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Remembering the Earlier Years

Looking back a quarter of a century later, the two decades of 1980's and 1990's were years of transition for the field of Iranian studies. They were also relatively lean years for the journal of *Iranian Studies*. As editor of the journal, between 1991 and 1998, I witnessed the impact of political upheavals on scholarly production: submissions, subscriptions and book reviews were down, there were meagre funds to cover the journal's running costs, and we had to rely on part-time editorial support and insufficient equipment to eke out four issues, often merging two or four into one. *Iranian Studies* nevertheless withered the crisis and survived and made available some impressive scholarship, which I would like to believe helped the journal to become academically more professional and eventually more viable.

During these years of transition, access to the country for research purposes was impeded. The Iranian revolution had the secondary effect of diverting many toward political events and somewhat away from their own fields of scholarship. Established scholars in the field in North America moreover were few and a new generation of Iran specialists was yet to fully emerge. The journal was reflective of these realities. Although since the late 1960's the journal under previous editors had threaded a long and impressive way to become the organ of the field of Iranian studies, gaps in the coverage of humanities and social sciences were palpable compared to other journals in the field of Islamic and Middle East studies. Iranian studies had yet to fully define itself and find its voice.

At the outset of assuming the editorship, I went to see the journal's previous editor, Richard Bulliet, and to learn about the ins and outs of the journal. There was a sense of disillusionment in his tone, amicably though it was expressed, as if he was empathizing with me for taking a seemingly arduous, perhaps an impossible, task. A small number of book reviews that I received in due course from the assistant editor amounted to the journal's entire inventory; not an encouraging start. There were very little by the way of institutional support and the Society for Iranian Studies, as it was then called, was still in institutional gestation. Yale was generous enough to budget a Mac desktop and assign an office, albeit in the dark and badly-ventilated basement of the Hall of Graduate Studies, a solitary, even eerie, space that could put off the bravest of the editors. As a "desk-publishing" journal, I had the task of redesigning the format and the cover, find a part time copyeditor and a printing company, negotiate the price, packaging and the postage, and try to increase subscription. At times I had to solicit articles and to work hard to get back assigned book reviews.

Yet many regular issues of the journal, and special issues, reaffirmed the field's great potentials for serious scholarship. Among special issues at least six stood out: "Carpets and Textiles of Iran," guest edited by Annette Ittig (1992); "Religion and Statecraft in

Pre-Modern Iran,” guest edited by Said Arjomand (1994); “The Constitutional Revolution,” edited by Abbas Amanat (1996); “Selection from the Literature of Iran, 1977-1997,” guest edited by Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak (1997), “Historiography and Representation in Safavid and Afsharid Iran,” guest edited by Rudi Matthee (1998) and “Review of *Encyclopedia Iranica*,” coedited by William Hanaway and Abbas Amanat (1998). A number of important articles by Fakhreddin Azimi, Edmond Bosworth, Houchang Chehabi, Juan Cole, Touraj Daryaee, Dick Davis, Mansoureh Etehadieh-Nezam Mafi, Ali Gheissari, Roxanna Haag-Higuchi, Ulrich Marzolph, Rudi Matthee, Vera Moreen, Afsaneh Najmabadi, Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi and Michael Zirinsky introduced diverse themes and new perspectives. The journal was conscious to strike a balance among subfields, notably history, literature, and anthropology. In the same vein it also aimed to broaden the temporal and spatial span of the journal by encouraging submissions in pre-modern topics. In “From the Editor” (26/1-2, 1993, pp. 3-5) I wrote:

“After more than a century of studies about Iran in the United States, it is fair to ask whether, as an academic field, Iranian studies has come of age. There is enough evidence to cautiously conclude that this is indeed so. More than ever in any country outside Iran (with the possible exception of pre-colonial India, which witnessed a Persian efflorescence) there are scholars in North America who, to a greater or lesser degree, specialize in Iran. The diversity of Iranian studies, if not the volume, is comparable to any other major field of study.”

Seeing how the journal has thrived since then, I am happy to note that my optimism was not misplaced. Under the editorship of Homa Katouzian journal’s progress, both in terms of quality and quantity, has been truly impressive. And as the new editor Ali Gheissari no doubt will bring the journal to a higher level of excellence.

New Haven, CT
November 2016