

Iran Facing the New Century

Editor's Note

It had been increasingly felt within the circles of the academic profession of Iranian studies that an extensive if not comprehensive study of the social, economic and cultural problems facing Iran, conducted with the utmost intellectual detachment and objectivity, was long overdue and had to be addressed by members of the profession. To this end an advisory program committee was formed consisting of Ahmad Ashraf, Ali Banuazizi, Hormoz Hekmat, Vahid Nowshirvani, Djavad Salehi-Isfahani, Reza Sheikholeslami and me who charged Sheikholeslami and me to arrange a conference on this theme at Wadham College, which was also sponsored by St Antony's College and the Oriental Institute, all of the University of Oxford. I took on the task of organizing and coordinating the conference as well.

The international conference entitled 'Iran facing the new century' was duly held at Wadham between 4 and 7 April 2004. It was attended by about forty-five guest speakers, chairs and discussants from distances as far apart as Hawaii and Afghanistan. And they presented papers and partook in discussions on Iranian national identity, domestic economic problems and issues, Iran's foreign and regional relations, issues regarding reforms and political development, the position of women, the Iranian Diasporas, etc.

From the earliest conception of the conference it had been intended that its proceedings should be gathered in final drafts and edited by me and Hossein Shahidi for publication as a book, a book which both because of its subject and in view of the prominence of its authors is likely to become a standard text for the relevant academic courses. We also decided as a first and quicker step to publish a number of the articles in a special issue of *Iranian Studies*, both because their authors were keen on this project and in the hope of reaching a wider audience and providing a foretaste of the whole collection when it reaches the market.

I should point out however that the last article in this issue was presented to another conference, the conference on economic history and Iranian economic history held in early December 2004 at the Teacher Training University of Tehran. They asked me to be the keynote speaker and I was otherwise engaged. They then suggested that I send them the paper and it would be presented by someone else, and as it turned out by Hossein Shahidi, to whom I am grateful both for this and for acting as joint editor of the collection as well as this volume. Since the paper had been written in English, I thought it would be appropriate to include it in this volume as a critical view of issues

arising both from economic history and especially from the economic history of Iran.

It is because of the great importance of the matter that I mention last the extremely generous financial support of the Persian Cultural Foundation, without which nothing like the scale and distinction of the conference could have been attempted let alone achieved. And all the more so because not only is Dr. Akbar Ghahary, the Foundation's Managing Director, terribly keen on the promotion of Persian and Iranian studies, but, equally helpfully, he does so with good humor, the minimum of fuss and no undue intervention in the running of the programs and projects which he supports. He therefore deserves a large vote of thanks and a big round of applause from all those who are involved in this process, be they lay or academic.

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