

Foundation for Iranian Studies

Program of Oral History

RICHARD FRYE

بنیاد مطالعات ایران

Foundation for Iranian Studies

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BOSTON: APRIL 25, 1989

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PREFACE

This manuscript is the product of a series of tape-recorded interviews conducted for the Oral History of Iran Program of Foundation for Iranian Studies by Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr with Richard N. Frye in Boston in April 25, 1989.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Richard N. Frye has been one of the foremost scholars of Iranian studies and Afghan Affairs in the U.S. He began his academic career following WWII. Educated at Princeton University, Frye spent many years in Iran and Afghanistan acquiring first hand knowledge of those regions. For many years he served as a member of the Faculty of the Pahlavi University of Shiraz, and the Director of that University's Asia Institute. Professor Frye has also been a first-hand observer in the community of scholars of Iranian studies in the United States.

Interview with Richard N. Frye, Foundation for Iranian Studies, by Vali Nasr, Boston, April 25, 1989

NASR: Professor Frye, let us begin with the theme of Iranian studies and the time you yourself became involved with it.

FRYE: Well, it's quite a long time ago. Before World War II that I started. I studied Arabic and Persian at Princeton in 1938 and Persian in 1941. So, my interest went back quite a number of years.

VN: What were the centers and climate of Iranian studies at that time? Were there numerous places --

RF: No, not at all. Princeton University was the only place where Modern Persian, the new Persian language was taught. Now, at Columbia they did teach old Avestan and old Persian and occasionally, Modern Persian -- but it wasn't a regular feature of teaching. In other places they occasionally in departments or rather courses on linguistics, old Persian and Avestan would be brought up, but new Persian was not taught regularly anywhere, nor anything, really, about Iran.

VN: Who did yourself work with?

RF: Well, for New Persian it was Mehdi Semsar. He actually lived in Philadelphia and came to Princeton to teach. Also for the ancient fields, Olmstead, who was a specialist on Achaemenid History, and several other people who were not specialists in Iranian, but it was mainly Semsar that I started New

FRYE

Persian with.

VN: Was there major interest? I mean, what sort of markets were you looking for? This was purely academic among your co-students or was there an air of going to service for government?

RF: No, it was purely academic. There was very little contact with Iran. Only missionaries and diplomatic personnel, and a few merchants. Usually the merchants were Iranians, Armenians, or others who already knew Persian. So from the academic point of view, there was very, very little interest, and very little, very little knowledge about Iran.

VN: Was there a bias towards what period of history or what aspect of the culture you would study?

RF: Oh, definitely! Before World War II, the only thing about Iran that interested people here in academia, was the relation to the Bible. This meant Achaemenid History and possibly a little bit later, but mostly Achaemenid History, that's Avesta and Old Persian. That was certainly the overwhelming interest of anybody who was interested in Iran.

VN: When you finished did you begin academic work right away?

RF: No, then the war came along and I went to Afghanistan, Iran, and Turkey. After the war I studied in London with Professor Walter Henning,

FRYE

Pahlavi and Sogdian and other old Iranian languages. So that was my real introduction into Iranian studies as opposed to Persian. Of course, I lived for two and one-half years in Kabul, Afghanistan and there studied --

VN: Were you a student then or --

RF: I was a teacher already. I was teaching for Habibi College under the Ministry of Education of the Government of Afghanistan.

VN: Were you in Iran at that time?

RF: Well, I passed through Iran. I really didn't stay. I came from Harat to Tehran and then on to Cairo, and then back again. I only stayed a short time in Iran at that time.

VN: Did the war change the climate in the academic environment?

RF: Oh, it certainly did, because, as you know, there were many American soldiers who went to Iran in the Persian Gulf Command sending supplies to Russia, and everything got turned upside down. In effect, what happened was, the United States discovered the whole Orient, for that matter certainly the Near East, after World War II. Before that time, as I said, there were only missionaries and a few other people interested in the area. Afterwards it was completely changed. You see, the United States,

FRYE

from being an isolationist country, then became a world power and took over Britain's mantel, so to speak.

VN: What was the input for people like yourself or say the Centers of Iranian Studies on this new interest in the American government?

RF: Well, not so much on the government. The government here behaved very much like governments everywhere. They pay very little attention to academics. Unless the academics happen to bless their policies already. Just to give you an example: I had many friends in Russia who were interested in Afghan studies and they advised the Russian government not to invade Afghanistan, because they knew the country and the people. But, of course, no one paid any attention to them. The same is true in Washington. They don't pay any attention to academics, as I said, unless academics favor their policies already made.

VN: What about new students? Did a lot of students in these programs go into the government?

RF: Oh, yes, there was --

VN: Was there any influence through that channel?

RF: Well, there was some influence, but the real influence started when the Peace Corps was established, and, of course, with the tremendous

FRYE

expansion of the use of oil. Then Iran, as well as Saudi Arabia, and other countries of the Middle East, suddenly became very important, economically. Again, people started going over there from the academic field. What was interesting before the war, as I said, there were very, very few people interested in Iran, and usually from a kind of antiquarian interest. Afterwards, anthropologists, sociologists, economists: everybody became interested in Iran.

VN: Was this a direct interest in Iran or were these fields themselves, you think, proliferated after the war.

RF: They proliferated themselves after the war. Many people were looking around for fields to go to and countries to go to. Anthropologists saw that there were tribes in Iran and they wanted to go to study the tribes and the villages. This is what happened mainly, that they discovered the country and decided that they would like to investigate.

VN: What was the impact of Iran, theoretically on these fields. Was Iran a major influence as for instance Bali was for anthropologists through Clifford Geertz or did, in any way, Iran become a major --

RF: Oh yes. Bart, the anthropologist who studied the

FRYE

Basiriyas, he set a trend. A lot of people went out. There were, very much so, people who became interested, especially anthropologists and archaeologists, of course, because Iran was a very fertile field. Very little had been done there and obviously was important in the past, and also in the present. As I said, in the relation between nomads and settled people, Iran was an ideal place to go.

VN: What was the Iranian government's position? We're talking about the fifties and --

RF: Well --

VN: like Iranian studies as such. . .

RF: Yes. On the whole, up to the fall of Mossadeq, everything was very much open. However, I should mention, just to give you an example, of the problems in Iran: I went in 1948, from Shiraz, down to Kazerun and then to visit several sites Sarmashed, and the government didn't -- Shiraz told me that I couldn't go, because they had absolutely no control over this area. So I had to make contact with the Qashqa'i, who were, in fact, so to speak, the government of that southern area. I went with the Qashqa'i to the places. So, there were parts of Iran that were, more or less, independent of Tehran. At least in their reality, of course, theoretically they were under Tehran, and paid taxes, off and on,

FRYE

to them.

VN: The government looked favorably on people like yourself working or were they apprehensive?

RF: Well, they were a little apprehensive, because it never happened before. A lot of people were coming into Iran in great numbers, and no, there was a great deal of suspicion and a great deal of problems. Now, one of the problems, I must say, that I had to explain many times to, not only Americans but other Europeans who came out to Iran, especially to Fars Province, to Shiraz where I was, to advise them. I said to them, "Now look, you have to get permission." When I went with the Qashqa'i, I had to go with the Qashqa'i, I didn't get government permission, but later you had to have permission to go anywhere and do anything. Now, suppose you have a bureaucrat sitting in Tehran, and somebody wants to go and study the Baluch for some reason. He thinks to himself, "I have to grant this [person] permission to go. Now, what do I get out of it? Suppose something happens to this person out there. Suppose he's killed by the Baluch or kidnapped. Then I'm to blame. I may lose my job, so why should I give him permission?" This was a widespread feeling, incidentally, it's not just true in Iran. It's true almost everywhere. It's a

FRYE

bureaucratic problem.

VN: Did you feel this to the end?

RF: Oh yes, it's always been that way. I always advised people coming there, as I said, the Europeans, as well as Americans, that they must put themselves in the shoes of the person who is supposed to give them permission and to do this. And make sure that nobody gets into trouble, if they get into trouble. To make sure that nobody is upset with what they're doing. Their reasons are also other reasons. Many times places were, not rebellious, but, you know, with some bandits in it and nobody wanted to take responsibility to allow people to go out, especially foreigners.

VN: When did you find interest among Iranian academicians or students in the kind of research you did, say the emergence of Iranian students interested in Iranian studies or such interest within Iranian universities?

RF: Well, there was always an interest there, but it kept on growing in the sense that Iranians became interested in many facets of their own country, which they'd never had before. For instance, anthropology, for instance, archaeologists began to develop. But, I must tell you one thing, with the oil boom, with the money pouring into Iran, most

FRYE

people lost their interest, pretty much as in other countries when they're concerned about making money and surviving. Let me explain why. I used to teach here, Old Persian and Avesta, and I would only have two or three students. When I went to Shiraz the first time, to teach there, in the Persian language, incidentally, I announced one of the courses was Old Persian. The first day of class I had, over twenty students showed up, and I said, "Oh my, I'm so glad to be here, in a place where people are really interested in this and they come in numbers." Well, I must tell you, five or six were from the College of Agriculture, four or five from medicine, three or four from engineering. I said, "Why are you here?" They said, "We have to take a distribution, and we saw in the catalog Farsi-e Qadim, and we said Well, if it's Old Persian -- I know Modern Persian, so this should be an easy, snap course for me." When I explained to them that it was not all that easy. Very different and written in cunieform -- why the next class there were only three students from the Department of Persian. So, I say, it's just the same as anywhere else, and that was true. There was a lot of lip service paid to the past of Iran, and, of course, pride in the past. But, very frankly, there wasn't all that much rushing around. For example, a

FRYE

few years before the revolution, a couple of years, I was sent around the country by the Ministry of Education to Mashhad, Tabriz, Esfahan Universities, just to do that, to see what the state of the teaching of pre-Islamic subjects were. The ancient history of Iran, the archaeology, Pahlavi, Old Persian, Avesta, and I must say, everywhere that I went the same story: we don't have any students and everybody is busy with something else and they're not interested. I mean, in spite of the fact that people think that under the Shah, there was this tremendous revival of learning about ancient Iran --it's not true. It simply did not happen.

VN: In comparison with the courses that had to do with the Islamic period, they were --

RF: Yes, certainly. Islamic period were much better off, but there again, all you have to do is look at the figures of students, you know, going into even the Persian language or history of the Iran, or Iranian studies of one sort. There were very few compared to those going into economics, engineering, agriculture, medicine, et cetera, all these things that were more important for a developing country. But, this idea that in those years there was a great increase, is not really borne out by the facts. Now, there were a number of scholars who developed,

FRYE

certainly, that they didn't have before, especially in Tehran, Tehran University. Special institutes were set up for the Persian language and for Khanlari's Institute in which they turned out a number of vocabularies of Pahlavi and Pahlavi texts. So there was definitely a small group of people who were very devoted and very well trained and we did have that. What I'm saying is that it didn't spread very much. There certainly were a number of excellent scholars.

VN: In the sense that there was a general revival in the arts -- in Persian Literature studies -- did this interest in ancient Iran develop within that framework?

RF: No, it was very little? It was really a separate field, because, well, for instance, in Shiraz, I taught Old Persian and I taught ancient history of Iran, and dialectology. I got more students interested in dialectology because they knew that there were these different dialects around, and they'd come from various villages and towns, and they were able to go back and work there and do something, that they could really produce something. So, there was certainly an interest, but what I'm saying is that this general idea within the populous and among the large group of students, that there

FRYE

was a revival of interest in study of Iranian culture, even Islamic, is not true. As I said, people were much too busy making money and doing other things.

VN: Culture generally was an second --

RF: I'm afraid culture took, very definitely, a back seat.

VN: Let me ask you this, Professor Frye. Since Shiraz itself is close to Takht-e Jamshid and to Pasargad, did you find there was a better awareness of ancient Iran and ancient Iranian studies, say among the students, or was it the same?

RF: Well, pretty much the same, because to the university in Shiraz, Pahlavi University, there came students from all over the country. Of course, by having Persepolis and Pasargad and Bishapiur near at hand, we were able to take students there and we had expeditions there which helped a great deal. I think, this certainly had a very positive effect in that regard.

VN: But the very existence of those sites did not have an imprint on the psyche of the Shirazis.

RF: Not very much. Not really. No. I mean, it didn't have the same effect, for example, as the monuments of ancient Rome had upon the present day Romans, who are proud of the fact that -- and they point them

FRYE

out. There was certainly an attempt to revive, to repair the monuments and the like, and to -- but people went out to, and I tell you frankly, to Persepolis on Friday for picnics.

VN: Did the population in large cities, toward the end, view ancient Iran with some sort of disdain, because it was so much favored by the government?

RF: Of course, there was a little bit of that. Surely, yes. Very much so. I think --

VN: Do you as a Professor feel that pressure from students, colleagues that you were teaching something that was [a] lopsided view of history?

RF: Oh yes, definitely. Especially, you know, with the Twenty-Five Hundred Years of Monarchy celebration at Persepolis and at Parsargad. A lot of people were rather annoyed about that, including the students, of course. They used that.

VN: Do you have any reminiscences of that?

RF: Indeed I do. [chuckle] I was very much involved in it, of course. It was a great extravaganza, but the thing that -- it was a little too much of an extravaganza, I must say.

VN: Was the objection more to the extravaganza or to the fact that it put too much emphasis on the ancient part, too much emphasis on Cyrus, and Darius?

RF: Both, I think. The greatest complaint was about the

FRYE

extravagance and the waste and that. Not so much, I mean, you know, Cyrus and Darius, even among the common people, you know, they had an idea of glories of the past and they were not opposed to that. It was too far away from them. The students kind of used this as a club against government, of course. They were under the influence of Shari'ati and other writers and the like, and so they used this, sure.

VN: How did they generally react to your presence at the university? Did they see you as an objective independent researcher or were you seen as a hand of the American government?

RF: At first, of course, they thought very much so, that I was an American spy, even. After a while, they realized that I was -- they became very puzzled because I complained very much myself about the changing of Shiraz. I used to say that they're making a little Tehran out of it. "Tehran Shode in dar al-cilm I recited to them that dar al-cilm became dar al-jaheliyyah. Which is true they really -- we used to have a very nice, what shall I say, Shiraz culture, where we had Sharbatkhanehs. Well, they were all changed. They got bars with vodka in them and people got drunk. People going around on motorcycles, and with gangs. It changed the whole nature of the place and

FRYE

I'm sorry to say, but I think the Americans were somewhat responsible for it. I said so. I used to go to Tehran, you know, and tell the taxi driver --I'd take a taxi from the airport and they asked me where I came from and I'd say, "I come from Iran." They'd turn around and look at me, and [say], "What do you mean?" Well, I came from real Iran, this isn't Iran, Tehran. It certainly wasn't. Tehran had a bad influence on the rest of the country in many respects. It was felt and resented by many Shirazis. I remember the first Festival of Arts that we had in Shiraz. I was on the Board for two years until they threw me off, because I said to the people there -- I said to the Tehranis, who came down to organize, I said, "Why don't we bring in people from neighboring countries, Afghanistan, Turkey, even Soviet Union, Tajikistan, dances, music and the like, for this festival." They looked at me and say, "Mr. Frye, we are avant-gardist, we are not folklorists. We want the most advanced shocking thing we can perform." That's what they did, and frankly, I remember I had my wallet stolen, the first year it was down there; I went to the Shiraz police -- we can't do anything -- these Tehranis come down and we've lost control of everything.

VN: Was the anger turned toward the government or merely

FRYE

the Tehran culture?

RF: Both. Toward the government. I remember once when I went to Qom, the last year, just before Ayatollah Borujerdi died, I went to see him. When I came back, I was going with a friend of mine, and we stopped in a southern Tehran place where all the Imam Jom'eh and everybody, a whole bunch of Ayatollahs and Mollas were there. I remember one of them getting up and, I'll never forget this, he said in public, "What we should do is slit the throats of all people living north of Takht-i Jamshid [Avenue], in this city." So there was definitely, well you know what happened in Iran. They Tehran/Shemran crowd became so separated from the rest of the country, they didn't even know what was going on. The only thing that interested them were the latest fashions from Paris and what was going on in London and Washington, not what was going on in Zabul or Mashhad, or Kazerun or places like that.

VN: Aside from the political resentment, did the Art Festival have any artistic impact on Shiraz? You know, what was it's original mission of having an artistic impact on Iran on art, culture development?

RF: [chuckle] I'll tell you. It was unbelievable. They came down and they wanted to get the most outlandish, the most far out productions of the left

FRYE

bank of Paris, of the ginso of Tokyo, or lower Manhattan. Things that would shock New Yorkers and Parisians and bring them to Shiraz. For example, they brought Stockhausen, who is the German Maestro of this modern music, which is not music, but loud sounds, tremendous, you know, loud sounds. He put up his loud speakers in Sara-e Moshir and the Bazaar in Shiraz, and this is late at night, you know. People are asleep, they have to go to work in the morning. Blasting these -- they tried to tell him to keep out of Shiraz, go out to Persepolis, put your music out there -- No, no, it's got to be right in the city so it has an effect on people. It sure did. They were ready to tear the place apart. The things that went on in Shiraz were -- of course it had no effect. The people became very upset. Then toward the end, just before the Revolution, the government in Tehran finally realized what was going on and they decided they better change, so they put on some ta^cziyeh. But, again, a little bit artificial, I must say.

VN: Did the Mawlawi dances from Turkey or Qawwali have an effect?

RF: But that's what they didn't do. They brought, as I said, the most way-out productions from Tokyo, Paris, particularly Paris, and London, and New York,

FRYE

and Berlin.

VN: When you lived in Shiraz, were you in contact with the religious establishment there.

RF: Yes, sure, off and on.

VN: Do you have any reminiscences?

RF: I used to go every, well not every, but frequently on Thursday evenings to the Khaksariyyah Khanegah. You know, I met people, even that time you'd have Ayatollas coming to Khanegahs

VN: Do you have reminiscence of any particular one?

RF: Well, I can't, my god, my memory is fading now. Some of top people of the Imam Jom^eeh, you know of Shiraz. But, I mean, I really didn't have anything, you know, much to do with them. I saw them, talked to them, and we had interesting little talks off and on, but nothing --

VN: What was their attitude about the university as a whole and studies like your own?

RF: You mean on the part of them?

VN: On the part of them.

RF: That's hard to say because many of them had sons and daughters studying at the university or in America or England or France. Just to give an example, my son was over there and he rammed in with the car to a mojtaheh, who was driving the car, and, of course, the police took us to the court. We were very

FRYE

polite to each other and the police were tremendously amused. They said, "Oh my god, he is a professor at the university and a mollah. How can we do anything. So [chuckle] I talked a lot with the -- he was a real mojtaheed all right. He was very nice. I got along all right with them and everything was quite relaxed until it got worse and worse somehow. It got very much more tense.

VN: Professor, did the rest of this evolving American establishment of Iranian studies, share your views or did they have a different philosophy?

RF: No, not on the whole. Although, I would guess that most of them -- you see, I worked for the Iranian government, I didn't work --

VN: But I'm saying generally, say the empathic attitudes for Iranian culture and the hands on attitude you had of being in place, experiencing first hand, having empathy for the local culture. Was this the dominant attitude?

RF: No, not dominant. Of course, there were others that felt very much as I did, but, of course, everybody considered me a little bit queer. You know, working for the Iranian government, being in Iran and being Iranian more than American. Because a lot of them came out there to use it as a field for study, put there model in. They could have just as well gone

FRYE

to Indonesia or Paraguay, or whatever; they came to Iran instead because they had a fellowship.

VN: Did they get sufficiently acquainted with Persian language and culture, in the sense that Iran sort of leaves an imprint on them?

RF: I would say the people who got the best imprint were in the Peace Corps. These people, because they really worked with the people, and they were out. Many of the others came to Tehran and became part of the embassy, Morris Newdsone, and Bell Helicopter people. I had nothing to do with them except when I have to meet them in the airport, and listen to their stories, which were, I must say -- I think the Americans, after the Vietnam War, many of them came to Iran; they are more or less soldiers of fortune, just to make money, and to have a good time. I must say, also at the Pahlavi University, I got very annoyed, and I told the different heads of the university [that] they were making a bad mistake. They would bring people -- we want Nobel Prize winners -- from the University of Pennsylvania, in physics. What's a Nobel Prize going to do in this college, you know, what's he going to teach? Of course, they got some first rate professors at enormous salaries, but they taught one course with their left hand and they went touring in the

FRYE

country, more or less. I mean, they contributed nothing, and then they went away. They had no stake or real interest in Iran. There were a lot of people like that, unfortunately.

VN: Did Iranian studies in the seventies have any impact on U.S. policy towards Iran? Say political scientists?

RF: I doubt it very much. Well, many some of the political scientists did. I would say people like Dick Cottam, for example, a former student of ours, who was in the state department and resigned because of his belief that the policies were wrong after Mossadeq. They were certainly not well regarded by the State Department, or by the government. But, there were others like Donald Wilbur, worked for the government actually, and George Lenczowski and others who were very much listened to. I really don't know, just what their influence was. My problem was that I kept away from the American government and most Americans most of the time.

VN: So, in other words, there were two different currents in Iranian studies.

RF: Oh yes, definitely. There were those who were, and I must say, that, in my opinion, those who were most appreciative, and who really were touched by Iranian culture were mainly those people who worked outside

FRYE

of Tehran and, like the Peace Corps, like anthropologists who really became interested in the country; people who were interested in helping the country, and, you know, found it very attractive. Unfortunately, I don't think they were in the majority, by any means.

VN: What year did you go to Shariz, Professor Frye?

RF: You mean to start teaching? That was in 1969, when I went there for the long period. Then I was the Director of the Asia Institute of the University for five years.

VN: How do you describe the general, say climate of relations with students and professors? Was it already political at that point?

RF: Oh yes. The politicization of the students had gone apace. Even somewhat in the faculty. In our field, that is in Iranian studies and art and archaeology, and languages and history, we sort of kept away from that. I mean, I'd really didn't have much to do with political feelings at all. There was no reason to and, I felt, that I shouldn't. It was not my business really.

VN: During the last decade of the Pahlavi regime, under the Queen's Bureau, there was a lot of interest in museums and rejuvenating interest in that aspect of culture. Do you have an assessment of that?

FRYE

RF: Oh yes. I was very much involved in that. I think this was something that, in the long run even now, and in the future, will have an impact, because they still exist, and I'm sure they will be revived again in the future. I think people, you know, even in Shiraz, when people were helping to restore, even the workers. They had a feeling of doing something for that. We employed people to restore the Narenjestan and helped out in other restorations. No, I think it was a very good thing. I remember once going on a trip up in Azarbayjan, way up toward the Turkish/Soviet border, and visiting an Armenian church. There was a Frenchman there who was having a terrible time because his interpreter had to go to Tabriz. He was complaining that the workers weren't working. So I had to go and talk to the workers; they were Kurds. They said, "Why should we work on this Armenian church? What are we doing?" I had to give them a lecture in saying this is one of the -- it doesn't matter that it's not Islamic or anything. It's got to be -- it's one of the treasures of the Iranian past. It's your duty, and they listened. I think I got through to them because, anyhow they went back to work. I think, little by little, there was some sinking in of the importance of preserving whatever the past had. I mean, you might not like

FRYE

some of it, but still the feeling that everybody has got the past, and it's necessary to have the memory and to preserve it.

VN: Professor Frye, what do you think has come of Iranian studies since the Revolution? Particularly your own area?

RF: Well, it's rather strange because, on the one hand, while there has been, obviously a decline in the sense that the government is not interested in it, even trying to change Nowruz and the like. Yet, the number of students has increased dramatically.

VN: In ancient history?

RF: I should say. My friend, Dr. Ahmad Tafazzoli, who teaches Pahlavi at Tehran University --before the Revolution he'd have four or five students, not more. Now he's got fifty or sixty in the classes. You know what it is; it's a reaction against the present regime. I think there's a very great reaction, editions of Ferdowsi are being sold in Tehran. Of course, you can't get a paper anymore. All of them, there's a great interest in the past. It's a kind of reaction against Arabization and over Islamization of Iran.

VN: It sort of has not extinguished that aspect of --

RF: Whatever they try, they can't get rid of Nowruz, they can't get rid of the past. Again, I think it's

absurd to try to do so. I gather, they have tried.

VN: What is being the effect on Iranian studies outside?

RF: Terrible. A dissemination, I mean there has been a complete collapse of Iranian studies outside. In this country, of course, what happened, which was bad in a way, that every university, and every museum, everybody -- depended on money from Iran, to support Iranian studies. So, along came the Revolution, the money stopped, then all their institutions and programs went - stopped. So students couldn't go to Iran. So nobody's studying in Persian. Nobody's studying Iran. Oh we've had disaster everywhere, I mean, many places, they've closed down centers of Iranian studies. Portland state used to have a flourishing department with three or four people teaching. Now, no one. All over the country, this is the case.

VN: You mentioned this money that used to come from Iran for Iranian studies. Did the Iranian government -- was there any values or objectives attached to the money that was given? What effect it had on the politics of Iranian studies on the kind of research was done or not done?

RF: Oh, I think there was directed research, but nothing forceful. The Pahlavi Library in Tehran with Shojā'eddin Shafa got interested in mythraism. I

FRYE

introduced him to a man called John Hinles, and so he gave them money for mythra conferences on mythraism. Well, mythraism hasn't got all that much to do with Iran but things like that did happen. I think it was unfortunate that it became so identified, you know. That the Iranian studies became identified with largess, with money coming from Iran. So that when it stopped, it stopped too.

VN: This brings up another interesting question. How did and how does Iranian studies fare against other area studies?

RF: Well, now they're in very bad shape.

VN: Not only comparatively, but as far as crossing territories, I mean some obvious cases are these debates over Persian Gulf and Arabian Gulf. But, even in a more basic way as to who wields more influence in American academia.

RF: Oh, American academia. The Arab/Israeli dispute overshadows everything. All of the entire area is dominated by Arab/Israeli problems.

VN: That even overshadows this romantic view of Iranian past?

RF: I'm afraid so. It's just overwhelming. Such that in every department that you look at, Iranian studies is at the very bottom of the totem pole. Well, in some places, Turkish is in bad shape, but

FRYE

even Turkish, generally speaking, is better off.
studies. Arab/Israeli dominate the whole thing.

VN: This combines with who pays money.

RF: Yes. Exactly. The money comes in from Jewish and Arab sources. No question about it. That's the influence politically, too. Iran has no political clout. Negative, I mean, as you know, enemy number one, I gather, for all Americans and Europeans, too.

VN: Is there a correlation between crisis and the American funding of projects?

RF: Yes, absolutely. There's no question about it.

VN: That doesn't happen. Say, instead of Iranian money that's no longer coming because this country's so central, that the U.S. Foundations would donate?

RF: No. Just the opposite. Quite the contrary. What U.S. Foundations and the government say -- since nobody can go there, since we're boycotting, since we're isolating Iran -- let's continue. They've simply written it off. That's the problem. You would think so, I mean, you would think that now that they haven't got this connection, that they ought to learn more about it.

VN: The whole argument about the Revolution was that we didn't know enough about Iran. That the natural conclusion would be that at particular times of crisis, there would be more funding for increasing

FRYE

knowledge.

RF: Well, this would work if we had relations with Iran in any way, but, I'm afraid, what has happened is there is a complete cutoff, boycott, isolation, whatever you want to call it, as far as the government is concerned, and I'm afraid that's kind of normal reaction you'd get from people who -- emotional -- Washingtonians. Of course, they're very upset with what's going on in Iran, but, quite right, they certainly don't know, but they didn't know before either. Everybody in the country, on the countryside knew there was a revolution coming, except the American Embassy, apparently.

FRYE, RICHARD N.

Name	Page
Bart,	5-6
Borujerdi, Ayatollah Seyyed	
Mohammad Hosein,	16
Cottam, Richard,	21
Education, Ministry of,	10
Henning, Walter,	2-3
Hinles, John,	26
Khanlari, Parviz Natel,	11
Lenczowski, George,	21
Mossadeq, Mohammad,	21
Olmstead, A.T.,	1
Pahlavi University of Shiraz,	12-13, 20-22
Pahlavi, Mohammad Reza Shah,	10
Pahlavi, Queen Farah,	22-23
Revolution of 1978-79,	24-25
Semsar, Mehdi,	1-2
Shafa, Shojac ^c eddin,	25-26
Shari ^c ati, c ^c Ali,	14
Shiraz Art Festival,	15-17
Stockhausen,	17
Tafazzoli, Ahmad,	24
Tehran University,	11-12, 24
Twenty Five Hundred Years of Monarchy Festival,	13-14
Wibur, Donald,	21

