

Preface

The papers in this volume dedicated to Ancient and Middle Iranian Studies were presented in Vienna 2007 on the occasion of the “Sixth European Conference of Iranian Studies” of the *Societas Iranologica Europaea* (SIE), the largest European independent academic organization of Iranian Studies founded in 1983 by several of the most renowned scholars of the field with the high goal of promoting and supporting this discipline in all its subject areas in European countries and worldwide. Following the previous conferences of the SIE, which have taken place every four years in Turin (1987), Bamberg (1991), Cambridge (1995), Paris (1999), and Ravenna (2003), the sixth conference in 2007 was organized at the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna. The number of participants at these large gatherings as well as in the smaller mid-term conferences of the SIE in Copenhagen (2001), Rome (2005) and Salamanca (2009) has increased continually across the years, bearing witness to the impressive scholarly commitment to one of the most original and fruitful ancient civilizations the world has known.

The proceedings of this conference, including papers by distinguished scholars as well as promising younger colleagues from European and non-European countries, reflect this commitment to a large degree, despite the continuous reduction of Iranian Studies, especially in the field of pre-Islamic Iran, over the past decades in different universities worldwide. It is one of the important goals of the SIE to take all possible measures to stop this short-sighted development and to encourage and support Iranian Studies in all the various subject areas of this vast field, encompassing philology and linguistics, literature, history, history of religions, arts, architecture, archeology, philosophy, sociology, geography, human sciences, jurisprudence and many others. This richness of different subject areas is reflected in the contributions presented in this volume dealing with the Ancient and Middle Iranian period (another volume will be dedicated to the papers on subjects from the Islamic period).

Although it has not been possible, for various reasons, to include all the papers held at the conference we hope that the studies presented here will aptly demonstrate the many fascinating facettes of a unique civilisation, which in the course of its long history has brought fourth a myriad of creative ideas and influenced the cultural development of humankind for many centuries. No matter in which subject matter we specialize, we are always confronted in Iran with a highly original manner of thought, a world of ideas which has set its own cornerstones, has influenced other neighbouring cultures to a high degree and has

adapted and interpreted foreign ideas according to its own specific parameters. Our sources all point to a distinctive culture, which, notwithstanding fundamental changes in the course of history, is discernable at the core of the fascinating achievements of the Iranians from the beginning of written texts up to the present. *Iranian Studies* is a distinctive discipline – let this be said unequivocally. It cannot be replaced by any other field without losing the important prerequisites which bring us nearer to understanding this unique and at times enigmatic culture.

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to all those who have made the sixth SIE conference and the publication of this volume possible. Our sincere thanks goes to the general secretary of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Prof. HERWIG FRIESINGER for agreeing to put the facilities of the Academy at the disposal of the SIE; to our colleague Prof. BERT FRAGNER, director of the Institute of Iranian Studies of the Academy, and his staff for competently organizing the conference; to the Board of the SIE during the presidency of MARIA MACUCH for financing this volume; to SUSANN RABUSKE of the Berlin Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities for her help; to CLAUDIUS NAUMANN for preparing the layout with his usual meticulous care; and, last not least, to all the participants who have shared the results of their research with us at the conference and have contributed to this volume.

The Editors