



Richard Nelson Frye: An Appreciation

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To write about Professor Richard Nelson Frye is not an easy task. His experience in the fields of linguistics, history, and art is so vast and diverse that even an outline is bound to overawe students of Iranian, Islamic, and Turkish disciplines. His scholarly career spans half a century and has influenced so many disciples in so many lands that one would not be exaggerating to say that his vita constitutes a major chapter of the history of oriental studies—Iranistic and Turkology, as well as Islamic and Central Asian learning—in the past fifty years. His achievements are difficult to measure in words. They include influential and enduring books and illuminating articles; founding, directing, or assisting with professional journals and institutions; creating or supporting chairs and courses in various Asian fields; forging cultural ties between institutions and peoples; and, above all, training researchers of rank in diverse fields who continue his works, striving toward his goals. He is indeed no ordinary scholar. He is a famed humanist of a learned and caring world.

I first met Richard Frye in Shiraz in 1968. Having just returned from London, I was teaching Iranian history, art, and archaeology there, and he was on a visit in order to oversee the setting up of the Asia Institute in Shiraz. His tall, imposing, and dashing handsome figure was a perfect reflection of his impressively documented and charmingly written book *The Heritage of Persia* which I had used as a guide and companion since 1964. On hearing that I was engaged in preparing a biography of Cyrus the Great, he jumped with characteristic enthusiasm and offered to help me secure a number of references not available in Shiraz. When I told him of my needs, he fulfilled his words gracefully and generously. That was the beginning of a cooperation which continues to this day. We traversed dusty roads, climbed dangerous rocks, and shared meagre meals on many

an "archaeological tour" in various parts of Iran. We fought the pre-revolutionary Iranian bureaucracy in order to save historic monuments or to institute true centres for Iranian studies in Iran itself. And we discussed, in person or by correspondence, different aspects of Iranistics. He made such an impression on me that when I graced the preface to *Cyrus the Great* (Shiraz, 1970) with the names of the teachers to whom I owed debts of gratitude, his could not be left out. Although divergence of opinions has not been lacking, he has never ceased to amaze me with the diversity of his experiences and expertise. The following sketch of his scholarly activities I owe to the enlightening discussions we have had over the past twenty years.

Richard Frye was born on January 10, 1920, in Birmingham, Alabama, to a Swedish family that moved in 1923 to Danville, Illinois, where he graduated from secondary school with high honours in 1935. Historical novels, particularly those of Harold Lamb, evoked in him a deep interest in history and the oriental world, and when in 1935 he went to Urbana to read philosophy at the University of Illinois, he pursued historical studies and was fortunate enough to have as his advisor Albert Howe Lybyer, professor of Ottoman and Near Eastern history, the author of the classic volume *The Government of the Ottoman Empire in the Time of Suleiman the Magnificent*. Lybyer had served on the King-Crane Commission to the Near East (1919) and was a model teacher. He started Frye, then sixteen, on the road to oriental history and also made him study Far Eastern, Armenian, and Eastern European history, thereby insuring for him a good background in historical method and historiography.

In the summer of 1938, young Frye attended the second Princeton summer school where he studied Arabic under Philip Hitti and Nabih Faris,

Turkish under Walter L. Wright, then president of Robert College in Istanbul, and Islamic art with Mehmet Aga-Oglu of the University of Michigan. Here he first met Albert T. Olmstead who fascinated him with his talks about the new discoveries of the Oriental Institute at Persepolis. He went to Chicago several times (his brother was studying there, and that made such trips easier) to talk with Olmstead about ancient Iran and the prospect of further study at Chicago. There he first met George Cameron and Nelson C. Debevoise and also attended seminars on Chinese Turkestan and Central Asia. These teachers influenced him with their different approaches to Oriental studies. This was not, however, the limit of his learning. He had joined the Reserve Officers Training Corps, studied cryptoanalysis, and trained in the horse-drawn field artillery. But before committing himself to pursuing a military career, he graduated in June 1939, having presented two theses: "Sufism Until the Time of Ghazzali" for philosophy, and "The Aryans in Central Asia: A Preliminary Investigation" for history. Both won high acclaim and evoked in him renewed enthusiasm to engage in oriental research.

Because there were so many young scholars at the Oriental Institute looking for work, Lybyer persuaded him to go to Harvard in 1939, and there he was accepted into the history department to work with Robert P. Blake, the specialist in Byzantine and Caucasian history, the person closest to his interest in Iran and Central Asia. However, he became a fellow of the Harvard-Yenching Institute under Sergei Elisseef, who gave him four hundred dollars a year for tuition on the condition that he study Chinese and the history of China, which he did for two years, as well as the archaeology of China and Japan. This work shifted his attention away from Iran to Chinese Central Asia, where he was greatly influenced by Lauriston Ward and Langdon Warner with his assistant Benjamin Rowland, Jr., all of whom brought him deeper into the works of Sir Marc Aurel Stein, Albert von Le Coq, Paul Pelliot, and others who had conducted investigations in Chinese Turkestan at the beginning of this century. At Harvard, he benefited from discussions with such scholars as Michael Rostovtzeff from Yale, Cardinal Eugene Tisserant from Rome (Eastern Christianity), and A. A. Vasiliev (Byzantine history). He also attended courses in Sanskrit, Russian, and Italian, thereby adding to the linguistic

training which he already had acquired at Illinois.

In the summer of 1942, Frye returned to Princeton to attend the third and last summer school on Islamic Studies. There he concentrated on Persian under Mehmet Simsar from Tabriz, who worked for the U.S. Customs on passing rugs but who had his Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania. With him, Frye began the translation and study of Narshakhi's *History of Bukhara* which was to become his Ph.D. thesis at Harvard. He also studied Islamic art with Richard Ettinghausen. While there he heard several lectures by Bernard Geiger, a refugee scholar in New York, on the Avesta and Pahlavi. He became well acquainted with Geiger later, especially in connection with the Pahlavi inscriptions from Dura Europos and other ancient Iranian matters.

When the war seemed imminent in the fall of 1941, the U.S. Navy established an intensive Japanese language program at Harvard. Frye enrolled but was soon transferred to Washington by his Princeton teacher in Turkish, W. L. Wright, then director of the Near Eastern Section of the Coordinator of Information (a recently established organization to advise the President), and headed the Afghan Desk. A year later he went to Afghanistan, passing through Near Eastern lands from Cairo to Kabul, where he stayed for two years to monitor German and Japanese activities among Afghan tribes. He taught at Habibiya College and improved his Persian and Russian. He made several official trips from Kabul through Iran to Cairo and back in 1943 and 1944 and also traveled to India, but he made good use of his time by visiting ancient remains. The ruins of Taxila made a great impression on him, especially because while there he met Kazaks from the Ili Valley who had fled across the high mountains to India. His interest in Central Asia was increased by such on-site visits and discussion with Orientalists. Most influential were Henry Corbin and Hellmut Ritter in Istanbul, where he lived from September 1944 through April 1945, sent there to interview Tatars who had arrived in Turkey through Russia from Japan. Corbin, in the course of many conversations, introduced him to the philosophy of Ishraq of Suhrawardi. Since Frye had read Heidegger's works while studying philosophy at Illinois, Corbin, who had translated him from German into French, was delighted and gave Frye more time than was usual. In Turkey, Frye also met such German refugees as Wolfram

Eberhard, the Sinologist who had worked on Chinese sources relating to Central Asia, and a number of Ottoman history specialists. He also spent many hours copying Persian and Arabic manuscripts in the rich libraries and made microfilms. These provided material for later works and publications, increasingly directed towards Iran and Central Asia. Thus, from these extraordinary experiences, the twenty-five-year-old Frye had acquired firsthand knowledge of Near Eastern politics, languages, history, art, and archaeology, a vast treasure which was to illuminate his future studies and repeatedly evoke amazement among his colleagues. An indication of his command of information appeared in *The United States and Turkey and Iran* (1951) in which he and Lewis V. Thomas presented what has been described by S. N. Fisher in *The Middle East* as "a concise and accurate analysis of American interests in these two states." I myself remember how in the Oxford 1972 congress on Iranian art and archaeology he engaged in conversation with several scholars in different languages and would not let them go until his curiosity was satisfied, at least that is what I learned from his conversation with A. A. Sarfaraz in Persian and G. Herrmann in English. In any event, by 1945 he had also acquired a large number of friends of all sorts—scholars, politicians, military, merchants, art collectors, and dealers. On his return to Harvard, his Ph.D. thesis, an annotated translation of Narshakhi's *History of Bukhara*, was accepted in 1946 with acclaim, and he received a fellowship in the Society of Fellows of Harvard University. The following year he spent in London's School of Oriental and African Studies where he, along with Mary Boyce and a few other privileged students, studied Sogdian and Pahlavi under W. B. Henning. Back at Harvard, he began teaching an anthropological survey of the Near East (as assistant to Carleton Coon) and Near Eastern history, languages, and religions. At the same time, he studied Armenian on the recommendation of Blake, and with him he translated and studied an Armenian text on the Mongol invasion of the Caucasus. This work brought him into contact with the Armenian community, where in 1953 he and Manoog Young, a student of his in the Extension School, founded the National Association of Armenian Studies and Research. In 1981 he was awarded a plaque by the Association as founding member. He gave many talks and banquets in order to raise funds for Armenian

chairs at Harvard, UCLA, and elsewhere in America. His work on Armenian subjects with many Armenian friends and colleagues has been hard but rewarding, earning him the title of "honorary Armenian" for services rendered to Armenian studies.

In the summer of 1948, he returned to Iran and while there several events were significant. He went from Shiraz to Kazerun, Farrashband, and by horse with the Qashghais to Sar Mashhad, which Ernst Herzfeld had visited. There he copied the Middle Persian inscription and recorded ruins in the vicinity. On a trip to Buzpar he almost died from lack of water and the intense heat. The result was rewarding, however, for he discovered the only known replica—albeit in small scale—of the tomb of Cyrus the Great at Pasargadae, a monument which has since been extensively studied. Visits to a number of sites and *chahr taqs* were made, despite the extreme difficulty then of travel in Fars. In Tehran he became acquainted with such literary figures as Ali Akbar Deh Khuda and his assistant Muhammad Mo'in, with P. N. Khanlari, Sadeq Hidayat, and especially with Said Nafisi and Abbas Iqbal, as well as Mehdi Bahrami in the Bastan Museum, E. Poure Daud, S. H. Taqizadeh, M. Minovi, Bozorg Alavi, Sadeq Chubak, Jalal Al Ahmad, Habib Yaghma'i, and many others. He was most impressed by the "Camelot days" of Iran where theatre and writing were free, and there was an enormous dynamism and interest among Iranian scholars and literati in the development of Iran. He was present in the discussions which led to the founding of the journal *Sukhan* and also the *Lughat-name* of Deh Khuda. Frye has told me repeatedly that although life in those days was not easy, Iran was a wonderful place to be, surrounded by such intellectual and creative activity. Even the *ulama* were fascinating, cooperating with various groups of scholars and politicians. "It is hard for me," he says, "to describe the feeling in Tehran at that time, but it was exhilarating." He enjoyed the company of many Iranian scholars who gave him encouragement and received him with hospitality. He taped Deh Khuda and Poure Davad and received from the latter the title *Irاندوست* ("Friend of Iran"), a designation which he still carries with deep satisfaction and uses as an additional surname.

At the International Congress of Orientalists in Istanbul in the fall of 1950, an Iranian scholar showed him several pages from what purported to

be the oldest manuscript in Persian with miniatures, the *Andarz Nameh*, also called the *Qabus Nameh*. When Frye went to Iran for a year in 1951–1952 he looked for the manuscript and at last found it in the hands of an antique book dealer called Fakhr ud-din Nasiri who also had many other works. He bought a *divan* of Mu^ʿizzi for the new Houghton Library of rare books at Harvard, but later they found it was only a superb forgery. This was his introduction to that shadowy world of forgers in Iran which was to cause him trouble. Also, during that year in Iran grants from the Guggenheim Foundation and the Fulbright program allowed him to make a long trip through the Biyabanak, Sistan, Baluchistan, and Kerman and to collect dialects and seek out ancient remains. This trip was important in that it brought him to areas of Iran which he had not seen before and allowed him to observe customs and peoples that had remained fairly undocumented, namely, the Isma^ʿilis of Kohistan (Gunabad, etc.), and the Nahruiis in Sistan near Kuh-e Khwaja.

When he returned to Harvard, he was asked by Hagop Kevorkian and the Metropolitan Museum to come to New York to catalogue his collection of Persian manuscripts, while Basil Robinson of the Victoria and Albert Museum did the same for the miniatures in the collection. He told Kevorkian about the *Andarz Nameh* and was asked to become a scholarly consultant to the Kevorkian Foundation and obtain the manuscript. He was sent first to Cairo, then Beirut, Damascus, and Tehran. In each city he contacted antique dealers in regard to the affairs of the Kevorkian Foundation, and by them he was introduced to the old world of antique dealers, forgers, and underground mafias in these areas. At last he obtained the manuscript and published a report on it with several pages reproduced in facsimile edition. This sparked loud criticisms when the manuscript later was proven to be a forgery, especially by the late M. Minovi. Although Frye acknowledged the mistake, he suffered because of it for a long time. "This opened my eyes," he once told me, "to an international combine of antique dealers and smugglers, which knowledge was interesting but for me somewhat frightening, and I wanted to learn less rather than more. When Kevorkian wanted me to move to New York, I agreed to come only if he created a chair of Iranian Studies at Columbia University. After much discussion and many slips and recoveries, it finally happened,

and I was appointed the first Kevorkian Professor of Iranian Studies at Columbia, but soon left it in favour of Harvard." He was succeeded at Columbia by the eminent Iranian scholar Ehsan Yarshater whose contributions to Iranian scholarship have amply justified the choice. The break with Kevorkian came when Frye publicly declared, at the Fourth International Congress of Iranian Art and Archaeology in New York in 1960, that they had all been deceived by the forged *Andarz Nameh*. Although he had known Arthur Pope previously, it was at this congress that he became closely connected with him and started upon a career of furthering the work begun by Pope.

At Harvard, meanwhile, Sadr ud-din Aga Khan studied Iranian history under Frye. Frye wrote to his student's father, the great leader of the Isma^ʿilis, and received a reply that the latter would create a chair of Iranian Studies at Harvard, which came to pass in 1957, and Frye became the first occupant in 1958. Prior to that time, he had been a member of the history department, where he taught courses on general Near Eastern history and cooperated with the department of Semitic languages. When the latter changed to the Near Eastern languages department, Frye joined it as well as the linguistics department which had been created from the committee on philology. But his most notable task was creating the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard—a long and tiring process begun in 1948 and finalized in 1954. Frye was appointed associate director of this new center under Professor William Langer who headed the new East Asian and Russian Research Center as well. When Thomson retired as professor of Arabic, Frye was instrumental in having H. A. R. Gibb invited to replace him and also to become head of the Center. He himself remained the senior consultant on the board of the Center, but increasingly turned his attention to Iranian studies, "happy to leave Ottoman history and the Arabs behind me," he once remarked.

Of other scholars who influenced Frye, two deserve particular attention: Ernst Herzfeld at the Institute of Advanced Study at Princeton, who gave Frye a deep appreciation of Iranian art and archaeology when he was in the summer school there; and Sir Harold Bailey in London, who exemplified the finest in philological studies, especially in the area of Iranian languages. In addition, Frye engaged in many fruitful discussions with Ilya Gershevitch in Cambridge, Arthur J. Arberry,

Reuben Levy, Laurence Lockhart, Hubert Darke, and others. During his several visits to France he met with Henri Masse, Emile Benveniste, and most notably Père de Menasce, with whom he forged a close friendship. In Germany, Frye discoursed with Wolfgang Lentz in Marburg, and with Walther Hinz and Hans H. Schaeder in Göttingen among others. He acknowledges how much he learned from these scholars, while Frye in turn has helped a large number of people—scholars, members of learned societies, students, government officials, documentary film makers, museum curators, archaeologists, archivists, librarians, and even travel agents. Anyone who has consulted Harvard's magnificent collections of Persian, Arabic, Turkish, and Armenian texts will recognize his marks—symbols for place, date, and cost of purchase—in many a frontispiece. There is hardly a major cultural institution in this country that does not have at least one educator who has benefited directly or indirectly from Frye's teaching. Many of his Soviet, Arab, and European students are now professors of respected colleges and universities, and some of the professional publications he has sponsored continue in their profitable programs. He has also arranged lectureships for scholars of various lands and fields at Harvard and other institutions. Of his founding activities, beside those already noted, the program in Indo-Muslim culture at Harvard (Minute Rice bequest) must be mentioned. He was one of the founders of the Middle East Studies Tehran center in 1967, where he contributed books for their library as he did for the Harvard library, the Orientalisches Seminar of Hamburg University, and the Asia Institute Library of Shiraz University.

Furthermore, in Iran he was a consultant for the Pahlavi Library in Tehran and represented Iran in exchange negotiations with Babajan Gafurov, head of Soviet Orientalists in 1972-1975, which resulted in the exchange of publications and visits of scholars. He organized the first summer school on Iranian studies at Shiraz University, using only Iranians to teach subjects previously never taught in Iran: Islamic art history (Firuz Bagerzadeh), Akkadian and Elamite (Majid Arfa^{ci}), and Achaemenid art and archaeology (myself), while he taught in Persian the history of Central Asia. The program was so successful that the envious bureaucratic authorities took it over the following year and, of course, ruined it. Frye also organized the first two all-Iranian symposia (later

taken over by the Tehran museum) on the results of archaeological expeditions for the year in 1973; the Second Mithraic Congress in Tehran in September, 1975; the 5th International Congress of Iranian Art and Archaeology in Shiraz in April, 1968; and during the 2500 year celebration at Shiraz, the World Iranist Congress. In June of 1964 he organized a conference on "Computational Techniques in Iranian Languages," the first such meeting on the use of computers for dictionaries, concordances, etc., at Bellagio, Italy, under the auspices of the Rockefeller Foundation. In 1972 he promoted the teaching of Persian at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst where previously he had acted as advisor on the creation of a Near Eastern program. In 1978 he introduced a new course at Harvard on "Areal Religions—Case Study of the Sasanian Empire." He also advised on the development of Oriental studies at the University of Pennsylvania in 1978 and at the University of California-Los Angeles in 1980. Earlier he had served on the American Council of Learned Societies committee to develop Near Eastern studies in America. He freely gave of his time and advice to various universities interested in Iranian studies and the teaching of Persian.

Of his varied editorial activities over the years, I single out the following: assistant and book review editor of *Speculum*; assistant editor of *Artibus Asiae*; editorial board member of *Indo-Iranica*, *Central Asiatic Journal*, *Journal of South Asian and Middle East Studies*, and *Iranica Antiqua*; and editor of the *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, first in Shiraz and now in the United States.

Of Frye's numerous students the following may be noted: John Limbert, a fine scholar who chose a diplomatic career with the U.S. Foreign Service, author of *Iran at War with Destiny* (1987); David Utz, who wrote his thesis on a Buddhist Sogdian text and is now editor of the South Asian series of publications at the University of Pennsylvania; Koji Kamioka, who is now director of the Japanese Center for Near Eastern Studies in Tokyo and co-editor of *Japanese Middle East Studies*, specializing on Iran; John Moyne, whose thesis was a transformational grammar of modern Persian, now professor of Linguistics at Queens University; Hooshang Alam, presently at the library in Tehran; a Czech student, Josef Adamik, who received his doctorate for a thesis on Baluchi dialects; and Richard Bulliet, now director of the Near Eastern Center at Columbia. Many students in

other disciplines studied with him, including Eiji Mano, professor of Western Asiatic history at Kyoto University, and Jan Nattier, assistant professor in Buddhist studies at Honolulu University. Many students of archaeology (including students of Lamberg-Karlovsky) studied the history and languages of greater Iran with him in the United States as well as in Hamburg and Shiraz.

A man of encyclopaedic knowledge, Frye is the author of numerous books and articles on Near Eastern and Central Asian studies which would be presumptuous for this writer to attempt to evaluate. But I may point to a few items which make Frye an Iranist of especial note. His fine translation of the *History of Bukhara* was so well annotated that it helped in establishing profound cultural and historical links between pre-Islamic Eastern Iran and the flourishing period of the early Islamic age. Every place, rite, and topic were identified, traced to their origin, and elucidated in a readable manner. His *Heritage of Persia* became a classic in a short time for its clarity of exposition, smoothness of prose, wealth of documentation—balanced yet unintrusive to the reader's thought—and for its beautiful illustrations. The author's warm feelings for Iranian culture are palpable in every page yet so wisely expressed that partiality could not be asserted. In its insistence that the early Islamic culture of Persia was a direct continuation of the Sasanian civilization, that, in other words, the Arab conquest changed little of the basic Iranian character of the nation, the book was a landmark in scholarship. Furthermore, in its treatment of various aspects of the heritage of *all Iranians*—Afghans, Tadjiks, Ossets, Turkish-speaking Iranians, Baluchies, and many other groups—*The Heritage of Persia* was, and remains, for the Iranians a unifying factor pointing to their common sources and their achievements. Its sequel, *The Golden Age of Persia*, had the goal of showing that through Islam, Muslim Iranians acquired a culturally rich world view, while transforming Islam into a world religion and civilization which would not have been created without their participation. Together, these two works document Iran's contributions to the cul-

ture and civilization of the world. They likewise attest to a scholarly method that combines lucidity with depth and enthusiasm with impartiality. It is unlikely that they will be soon replaced. Even Frye's own, more recent, heavily documented *The History of Ancient Persia* cannot compete in prose and in proportion of topics with *The Heritage of Persia*. Furthermore, Frye's effort in editing the fourth volume of *The Cambridge History of Iran (From the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs)* which includes a rich account by him on the Samanids, must be noted as another enduring service to Iranian scholarship.

Space does not permit mentioning more than three outstanding articles by Frye. His "The Charisma of Kingship in Ancient Iran" (1964) brought together and advanced our knowledge on a number of Iranian ideologies concerning the royalty and symbolism of dynastic founders. It remains a fine introduction to a deep-rooted and long enduring tradition in Iranian history, namely, the belief in divine support associated with worthy ancient Iranian kings. In 1976 he published a concise but decisive discussion of the underground structure at Bishapur in Fars ("The So-called Fire Temple of Bishapur"). This enigmatic monument usually had been identified as an open or roofless temple of Anahita, but by citing a drawing made by James Morier five generations earlier which showed windows (now disappeared) at the top of the remaining wall, Frye proved that it had once carried a roof. The third article was on "The Aramaic Inscription on the Tomb of Darius." Frye examined previous attempts at deciphering and dating the inscription and showed that it was an Old Persian text in Aramaic script carved by a late Achaemid king. Naturally, Frye's contributions are not limited to those outlined here. As an Iranist, he is a giant figure, pioneering in some respects, and complementary in others. Many, including this writer, will take issue with some of his views, but none questions the fact that on many aspects of Near Eastern antiquities he will remain an authority of respected position and enviable success.