

## **Prestigious News Report: Second Symposium on Iranian Studies Honors Professor Bert Fragner in Vienna**

Vienna, April 3, 2025 – The Second Symposium on Iranian Studies, coupled with a tribute to the late Austrian Iranologist Professor Bert Fragner, was held in Vienna, Austria, under the auspices of the Cultural Office of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Austria. The event, hosted at the Iranian Wisdom House, drew a distinguished gathering of scholars, researchers, and enthusiasts of Iranian culture and civilization. Running from 4:00 PM to 7:00 PM local time, the symposium celebrated the intellectual legacy of Professor Fragner, the founder of the Institute of Iranian Studies at the Austrian Academy of Sciences, while fostering a dynamic exchange of ideas on Iran's rich history and heritage.

The symposium's central theme revolved around the scholarly contributions and philosophical insights of Professor Fragner, a globally renowned figure whose extensive research illuminated the field of Iranian studies. His works remain a cornerstone of academic inquiry, and his lifelong dedication significantly advanced the discipline in Austria. The event featured a lineup of prominent speakers, including Fragner's widow, who offered a heartfelt reflection on his character and academic passions, alongside Professors Rüdiger Lohlker, Nosratollah Rastegar, Mitra Shahmoradi, and Dr. Reza Gholami. Their diverse perspectives enriched the proceedings, transforming the symposium into a vibrant forum for knowledge and dialogue.

### **Keynote Address by Dr. Reza Gholami: A Phenomenological Exploration of Iranians and Their History**

Opening the symposium, Dr. Reza Gholami, a university professor and Iran's Cultural Representative in Austria, welcomed attendees with a thought-provoking lecture titled "The Relationship of Iranians with Their History: A Phenomenological Approach." His address delved into the profound connection between Iranians and their millennia-old history, analyzing its cultural, linguistic, and philosophical dimensions. "History is not merely a catalog of past events," Dr. Gholami asserted, "but the root that shapes a nation's identity—culturally, intellectually, and socially."

Drawing on the perspectives of six towering philosophers—Hegel, Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Husserl, Heidegger, and Gadamer—Dr. Gholami explored the evolving bond between societies and their histories. He highlighted Hegel's view of history as a logical process toward freedom, Schleiermacher's empathetic understanding of historical texts, and Dilthey's focus on lived experiences. Husserl, he noted, saw history as embedded in consciousness, while Heidegger deemed it intrinsic to human existence. Gadamer, meanwhile, envisioned history as a living dialogue between past and present. These phenomenological lenses, Dr. Gholami argued, offer fresh insights into how Iranians perceive their historical narrative—not as a static timeline, but as a dynamic interplay of creation and influence, reflected in traditions like Nowruz, the recitation of the *Shahnameh*, and rituals like *Ta'zieh*.

Dr. Gholami emphasized the pivotal role of the Persian language in shaping Iranian identity, describing it as more than a tool of communication. “Persian poetry and prose,” he said, “convey intuitive experiences and practical wisdom, simplifying complex concepts through rich metaphors.” With its mystical vocabulary—words like “mystery,” “love,” “light,” and “truth”—Persian binds Iranians to their history and existence. He also explored Iranian wisdom, rooted in ancient traditions, Islamic philosophy, and mysticism, which views history as a reflection of deeper truths. This wisdom, he outlined, rests on three pillars: human perfection through spiritual growth, the unity of material and metaphysical realms, and the inseparability of thought and action.

Concluding his remarks, Dr. Gholami paid tribute to Professor Fragner, who lived in Iran and fell in love with its culture. “His establishment of the Institute of Iranian Studies in Austria was a monumental step,” he said, “and much of today’s progress in the field owes itself to his foundational efforts.” Expressing gratitude to Fragner’s widow and fellow speakers, he voiced hope that the symposium would inspire a new generation of Iranologists.

### **A Widow’s Tribute: The Life of Bert Fragner**

Professor Fragner’s widow delivered an emotional account of his journey, tracing his fascination with the East from childhood—despite familial opposition—to his academic pursuits in history and Persian language. Initially drawn to Ottoman and Arabic studies in Vienna, a transformative encounter with an Iranologist mentor ignited his lifelong devotion to Iranian studies. Overcoming financial hardship through teaching and theater work, Fragner’s travels to Iran deepened his passion. Supported by Iran’s Cultural Office and a 1964 scholarship, he studied under luminaries like Iraj Afshar and Mohammad Jafar Mahjub. His 1970 doctoral dissertation on “The History of Hamadan in the Sixth Century AH” marked a pioneering contribution to the field.

### **Scholarly Reflections: Fragner’s Lasting Impact**

Professor Rüdiger Lohlker, a distinguished German Iranologist and Islamic scholar based in Austria, lauded Fragner as a figure surpassing even the great Joseph Hammer-Purgstall. “Fragner lived, studied, and worked in Iran,” Lohlker remarked, “building the Institute of Iranian Studies with unparalleled vision.” Describing him as a mentor whose lectures were “treasures of knowledge,” Lohlker credited Fragner with elevating Iranian studies in Austria and beyond.

Dr. Nosratollah Rastegar, another prominent Iranologist, recalled meeting Fragner in 1985 and hailed him as a multifaceted exemplar. He highlighted Fragner’s supervision of over 20 doctoral theses, authorship of 80 articles and six books, and recognition as Iran’s distinguished Iranologist in 2004. His legacy, Rastegar noted, continues to inspire.

Adding a poetic flourish, Professor Mitra Shahmoradi recited verses from Ferdowsi, Rumi, Saadi, Hafez, and Parvin E’tesami—poets cherished by Fragner—celebrating themes of love and transcendence.

### **Awards and Commemorations**

The symposium concluded with the unveiling of the Bert Fragner Book Award, established in his honor, by Professors Lohlker and Sibylle Wentker alongside Fragner's widow. Launched in 2024, the award will recognize three outstanding works in Iranian studies this year. A commemorative plaque was also presented to Fragner's widow, inscribed with a tribute to his passion for Iran and his enduring scholarly bridge between Iran and Austria.

Hosted by the Iranian Wisdom House, the event underscored the vital role of Iranian studies in fostering cultural ties between Iran and Austria. Attendees praised the depth of the presentations and the warm, collegial atmosphere, affirming the symposium's success in honoring a titan of Iranology while advancing scholarly discourse.