

The Third Symposium on Iranian Studies in Austria was held

The Third Symposium on Iranian Studies in Austria, titled “An Evening with Professor Dr. Rüdiger Lohlker, the Prominent Austrian Islamic and Iranian Studies Scholar,” took place on the evening of Thursday, 8 Aban 1404 (corresponding to 30 October 2025), organized by the Iranian Wisdom House in Vienna.

This program was held in the presence of a group of university professors, researchers, Iranian studies scholars, and enthusiasts of Iranian culture and civilization on the famous Mariahilfer Street in Vienna.

At the beginning of the program, the symposium’s host, Dr. Viktor Szabo, a PhD graduate in Oriental Studies from the University of Vienna, provided a brief overview of the academic life and research activities of Professor Dr. Rüdiger Lohlker. Referring to his numerous works in the fields of Islamic studies, Iranian studies, and philosophy of religion, he emphasized Lohlker’s effective role in expanding cultural and inter-civilizational studies in Austria and throughout Europe.

Subsequently, prominent figures from Austrian and Iranian academic and university circles delivered speeches, including:

Professor Dr. Rüdiger Lohlker, distinguished retired professor and former holder of the Chair of Islamic Studies at the University of Vienna, is one of the most recognized European researchers in the fields of Islamic studies, Iranian studies, and intercultural relations. He has taught and conducted research for many years in Islamic jurisprudence, comparative theology, and cultural philosophy, publishing numerous works in these areas. He is also an expert in historical and traditional Iranian gardens.

Dr. Hans D. Galter, Associate Professor of History and Oriental Studies at the University of Graz, who is considered one of the leading experts in ancient Middle Eastern civilizations and comparative cultural studies.

Professor Dr. Katharina Ivanyi, Professor of Islamic Philosophy and Oriental Languages at the University of Vienna, whose research focuses on philosophical and mystical thought in the Iranian and Arabic traditions, and who works on the connection between Islamic philosophy and contemporary humanities.

Dr. Ghazaleh Faridzadeh, Iranian studies scholar and researcher in Persian language and literature at the University of Vienna, who researches and teaches in the areas of literary and linguistic interactions between Iran and Europe, as well as the reflection of Iranian culture in the West.

Mahshid Sadeghi, researcher in philosophy and cultural studies in Austria, who pursues projects on intercultural dialogue and the reinterpretation of the intellectual heritage of Islam and Iran.

Dr. Reza Gholami, Professor of Political Philosophy and Cultural and Civilizational Studies, and President of the Iranian Wisdom House in Vienna, who has published numerous works in Persian and English on social justice philosophy, philosophy of civilization, and the revival of ethics in the contemporary world.

Professor Hans D. Galter: Praise for the Architect of Modern Islamic Studies in Austria at the University of Vienna

Professor Hans D. Galter, Associate Professor of Oriental Studies at the University of Graz, as the first speaker of the symposium, in an impassioned speech, called Professor Rüdiger Lohlker the “architect of independent Islamic studies in Austria.” He said that the discipline of Islamic studies, which emerged from the shadow of traditional linguistics after the tragedy of September 11, 2001, today stands unrivaled in the German-speaking world through its deep exploration of transformations in the Islamic world.

Dr. Galter traced the roots of Islamic studies in Austria back to the late Professor Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, the father of Austrian Orientalism, and added: The translation of Hafez’s Divan in 1814, which inspired Goethe to create his masterpiece “West-Eastern Divan,” as well as the poetic translation of the Quran preserving its Arabic rhythm, and the establishment of the Vienna Oriental Institute in 1886 following the World Congress of Orientalists, laid the foundation for Islamic and Iranian studies in Austria.

Furthermore, in the city of Graz, Karl Brenner, encouraged by Klaus Schadel (“We have enough biblical scholars!”), explored the relationship between Islam and Christianity, paving the way for strengthening Islamic studies in Austria—though unfortunately, after his retirement in 2016, the discipline was dismantled in Graz.

Professor Galter continued: Rüdiger Lohlker, confronting the stormy traditional philologists—who considered linguistics the sole foundation for West Asian studies—established an impartial discipline for the study of Islam. In his widely read blog “Sandals of Tradition,” he relentlessly fought media stereotypes such as “political Islam” and “radical Islam,” emphasizing the importance of scientific and unbiased study of Islam.

He added: In addition to Islamic studies, Rüdiger Lohlker has turned to the history of Iranian gardens, with studies in this field that open a fresh window into understanding Iranian-Islamic civilization.

In conclusion, Galter quoted the recently deceased Heinz Nussbaumer, warning: “Austria once built eternal bridges between Europe and the East; today this heritage is in danger of being forgotten.” Yet Professor Lohlker, even in retirement, remains the flagbearer in preserving these bridges.

Professor Katharina Ivanyi: Professor Rüdiger Lohlker, Flagbearer of Multidimensional, Precise, and Non-Stereotypical Islamic Studies in Austria

Professor Katharina Ivanyi, Professor of Islamic Philosophy and Oriental Languages at the University of Vienna, as the second speaker of the symposium, praised Rüdiger Lohlker as a “rare scholar” who, over 23 years, single-handedly founded Islamic studies in Austria and, despite immense challenges, transformed it into a broad and dynamic discipline.

Ivanyi highlighted: Lohlker made Islamic studies independent at the University of Vienna, nurtured the younger generation with energy, collaborated at the “Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society” research center, and created lasting impacts beyond Vienna through valuable consultations.

She added: The scope of Lohlker’s research is astonishing: from Maliki commercial law in early Islam and usury before modernity, to Salafism, Sufi traditions, environmental theology, Islam in Indonesia and Southeast Asia, and the Persian-speaking world.

Professor Katharina Ivanyi said: His most distinctive contribution is rejecting “the simplistic explanation of Islam.” Ivanyi quoted: “In the introduction to his book History of Islamic Ideas, Rüdiger Lohlker says: Explaining Islam as a single, one-dimensional, and fixed prescription of Islam is like treating Islam politically, ignoring its heterogeneities and profound textual layers. We should not say what Islam is or should be.”

Ivanyi added in this regard: Lohlker, aware of the complexity and diversity of Islam, views knowledge as “fragmented yet coherent” and sees contradictions not as obstacles but as connectors.

Professor Ivanyi added with humor: The prophetic hadith about the wisdom of the Persians seems to apply to Rüdiger Lohlker as well! For throughout his academic life, he has always pursued knowledge and has kept Iran in mind for this purpose.

Dr. Ghazaleh Faridzadeh: Dialogue, Not Judgment; Knowledge as a Bridge Between Cultures

The third speaker of the Iranian Studies Symposium in Vienna was Dr. Ghazaleh Faridzadeh, a professor at the University of Vienna. In a thoughtful speech, she analyzed the scholarly and human character of the prominent Austrian Islamic studies scholar, Professor Rüdiger Lohlker.

She described Lohlker not only as a great researcher but as a thinker who, with a critical, open, and courageous spirit in the face of complexities, was able to build lasting bridges of dialogue between East and West, as well as between various branches of Islamic studies and the humanities.

Dr. Faridzadeh emphasized that, from Lohlker’s perspective, knowledge is not “the owner of truth” but “a shared search for understanding.” In his view, research in the fields of Islam and Iran should not be from a position of judgment but in the form of dialogue with the text, thought, and Iranian-Islamic human being.

She recalled that Lohlker, with his vibrant and dynamic view of Islam, saw this phenomenon not as something fixed and closed but as a transformative and dialogue-oriented reality.

Ghazaleh Faridzadeh added that Lohlker's works, especially in digitizing Islamic culture, religious communications, and social movements, have opened the traditional boundaries of Orientalism and elevated it to a new realm of mutual cultural thinking.

Dr. Faridzadeh, in another part of her speech, referring to the unbreakable bond between Iran and Islam, emphasized: "Islamic studies without knowledge of Iran is incomplete; because Iran, both geographically and intellectually, lies at the heart of the Islamic world."

She also criticized the absence of an independent chair in Islamic Iranian studies at the University of Vienna, describing this gap not only as organizational but as an intellectual deficiency that leaves the image of the East incomplete.

Dr. Reza Gholami: The Possibility of Presenting an Eightfold Reading of Islam

Another speaker, Dr. Reza Gholami, Professor of Political Philosophy and Cultural and Civilizational Studies, dedicated his speech titled "Eight Readings of Islam" to a methodical explanation of the diversity of approaches in understanding religion.

Referring to the fact that "a reading of Islam means viewing religion from within a specific epistemological world," he emphasized that no single interpretation can represent all dimensions of Islam, and a sincere researcher must openly declare their epistemological position to maintain the scientific credibility of Islamic studies.

He then introduced eight types of readings of Islam: theological (centered on faith and rational defense of beliefs), jurisprudential (focused on rulings and religious obligations), ethical (emphasizing moral education and spirituality), philosophical (based on rationality and purifying religion from superstitions), mystical (seeking inner and intuitive experience of religion), historical (analyzing Islam's transformations over time), psychological (focusing on the calming and meaning-creating role of faith), and finally scientific (attempting to explain religion based on scientific method).

Dr. Gholami, by examining the strengths and limitations of each approach, emphasized that "the main issue is not the correctness of one reading, but its effectiveness for the research objective." In conclusion, appreciating the scholarly position of Professor Rüdiger Lohlker, he described him as an outstanding example of researchers who, with scientific honesty, theoretical depth, and an open mind, have made the path of Islamic studies more dynamic and credible.

Mahshid Sadeghi: A Student's Tribute to the Teacher; A Bond of Knowledge, Affection, and Inspiration

The fourth speaker, Ms. Mahshid Sadeghi, a PhD student in Oriental Studies at the University of Vienna and a long-time student of Professor Rüdiger Lohlker, spoke passionately and intimately about more than a decade of apprenticeship under this prominent Islamic studies professor.

Expressing gratitude to Dr. Reza Gholami, President of the Iranian Wisdom House in Vienna, for expanding and deepening Iranian studies in Austria, she seized the opportunity to remember her professor not only as a university teacher but as “a guide, inspirer, and beacon of the academic path.”

Professor Dr. Rüdiger Lohlker: From Orientalism to Iranian Studies; The Narrative of a Lifetime Bond with the Iranian World

In the closing of the symposium, Professor Dr. Lohlker, as the keynote speaker at the Third Iranian Studies Symposium held in Vienna with the presence of Iranian and Austrian professors and researchers, referred to the long history of intellectual and cultural interaction between Iran and the Western world, stating that “Iran has played an irreplaceable role not only in the history of human civilization but also in shaping global concepts of reason, ethics, and spirituality.”

Professor Lohlker continued by reviewing the views of Iranian philosophers and Muslim thinkers, emphasizing that dialogue between East and West will be fruitful only when based on mutual understanding, cultural respect, and acceptance of epistemological differences. He added: “True knowledge is achieved only in the shadow of deep and prejudice-free dialogue between intellectual traditions; where Islamic philosophy and European philosophy can learn from each other.”

In another part of his speech, Lohlker referred to the role of contemporary Iranian studies in Europe, reminding that this discipline must move beyond a purely historical perspective and address the living and dynamic dimensions of today’s Iranian culture as well. Citing examples from University of Vienna studies and joint projects between Iranian and Austrian researchers, he stressed the necessity of developing scientific cooperation between the two countries.

In concluding his remarks, while appreciating the Cultural Consulate of Iran in Austria (Iranian Wisdom House, Vienna) for organizing these symposia, he emphasized that future Iranian studies must build a bridge between knowledge, cultural diplomacy, and civilizational understanding—a bridge founded on mutual respect and a passion for truth.

It is worth noting: During his speech, Professor Lohlker addressed the necessity of establishing the discipline of Iranian studies in Austria, recalling that over the past twenty years, at least twelve attempts have been made to establish an independent chair in Iranian studies at the University of Vienna, but none have yet succeeded. According to him, this shortage stems not from Iran but from weaknesses in Austria’s scientific policy.

This symposium, accompanied by the screening of a short clip about Professor Lohlker, was held in an intimate yet scholarly atmosphere and was met with widespread welcome from professors, researchers, and enthusiasts of Iranian studies. At the end of the session, an opportunity was provided for open dialogue among professors and participants, with emphasis on the necessity of continuing these gatherings to deepen understanding of Iran and expand cultural interaction between East and West.

The Iranian Wisdom House in Vienna, which operates with the aim of promoting Iranian philosophical, scientific, and cultural thought in Europe, announced that this event is part of a series of joint Iran-Austria programs in the field of Iranian studies, and the fourth symposium will be held in the near future.
