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The Possibility or Impossibility of Studying the East Without Iranology: An Analysis Based on the Views of International Thinkers

Abstract

The place of Iranian civilization and intellectual heritage in Oriental studies has always been a subject of methodological debate. In some classical and Arab-centered readings, Iranology has been pushed to the margins. The aim of this research is to analytically examine the possibility or impossibility of studying the East without considering Iranology, and to explore the epistemological consequences of this neglect.

This research was conducted with a qualitative approach. Its data were collected by posing three structured questions to a specialized panel of seven prominent international thinkers and researchers in diverse fields (including Islamic philosophy, mythology, postcolonial studies, and Islamic studies).

Comparative analysis of the specialists' views shows that the Iranian civilizational sphere is not a marginal element, but rather a "hub" and the connecting core of thought in the East. The findings indicate that excluding Iranology leads to serious gaps, including "reducing Islamic civilization to a purely Arab phenomenon," "breaking the continuity of understanding the history of philosophy and rational sciences," and "ignoring the role of the Persian language as the epistemological infrastructure of Asia."

Studying the East (especially in the regions of India, Central Asia, and Anatolia) without the analytical tools of Iranology is not only incomplete, but structurally impossible. However, recognizing this centrality must be done while avoiding reductionist, romantic, and nationalist approaches, so that it helps achieve a real understanding of the diversity and complexity of historical and contemporary Iran.

Keywords: Oriental studies, Iranology, Persianate world, Islamic civilization, Shiism.

1. Introduction, Problem Statement, and Research Methodology

The place of Iran and its intellectual heritage in Oriental studies is a topic that has been reconsidered many times in recent decades. Some classical European traditions of Oriental studies, especially in Arab-centered readings of Islamic civilization, have tended to place Iranology on the margins of Eastern studies or to absorb it into more general frameworks. To

accurately test this claim, this research adopted a qualitative approach and formulated three fundamental, open-ended, and structured questions. These were posed to a number of prominent international professors and researchers in the fields of Iranology and Oriental studies, asking them to express their views: first, to what extent Iranology holds a central place in Oriental studies; second, whether it is possible at all to properly understand the East without paying attention to Iranian heritage; and third, what shortcomings and gaps the neglect of Iran creates in Oriental studies research.

Before presenting the views of each respondent separately, it is useful to note that some of the answers, in addition to a general judgment about the centrality of Iran, also provide more detailed arguments based on textual evidence from the ancient period. A prominent example is the response of Dr. Jaleh Amouzgar, which is presented in detail under each of the three questions below.

It must be emphasized that posing these questions is not based on an ideological or political motive. Rather, it is a methodological and academic question in the field of comparative civilization studies: which civilizational elements have played a constructive and fundamental role in the intellectual map of the East, and which have played a secondary role. The answer to this question rests on linguistic, textual, institutional, and historical evidence, not on a value judgment about the superiority of one nation or culture over another. As will be seen in the comparative analysis section, at least one of the respondents explicitly warns that recognizing this place should not lead to the reproduction of a uniform, romantic, or nationalist image of Iran. In other words, this examination is not praise of a nation, but a critique of a research methodology (the removal or marginalization of a civilizational link from the equation of Oriental studies).

The value and fruit of this research also lie here. From a methodological perspective, this study is based on “Directed Content Analysis” and “comparative study.” As far as the author knows, this is the first time that answers to these three questions have been collected directly and specifically from a purposeful target group consisting of well-known professors and specialists in different disciplines and academic traditions — Islamic philosophy and wisdom, comparative literature and postcolonial studies, historical linguistics and Iranology, post-Mongol Islamic studies, mythology and ancient Iranian languages, and contemporary strategic studies of Iranology. The primary data were collected completely independently, without the respondents knowing the views of their colleagues, and in three languages (Persian, English, and German), and were then translated and compiled.

The result of this work is not a single opinion, but the possibility of measuring the degree of convergence or divergence of views. In the data analysis stage, comparative comparison was used to extract these common themes and differences of viewpoint. The independence of the collection process noticeably increases the empirical validity of the shared findings — which are addressed in the fifth section. In addition, the researcher, by adopting a critical approach to his own method (Reflexivity), is aware of the possibility of selection bias in such a like-minded panel and evaluates the resulting findings not as an absolute consensus that negates the voices of critics in the entire field of Oriental studies, but as a scientific and precise formulation of a specific intellectual spectrum in civilizational studies.

In what follows, the responses received from the professors and researchers below are presented, in order, under each of the three questions, and are finally summarized in the form of a comparative analysis: Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Professor Ian Almond, Dr. Nosratollah Rastegar, Dr. Gholamreza Aavani, Professor Rüdiger Lohlker, Dr. Jaleh Amouzgar, and Dr. Reza Gholami.

2. The Fundamental Place of Iranology in Oriental Studies

The first question addresses the extent to which Iranology, considering both pre-Islamic and Islamic Iran, lies at the heart of Eastern studies.

Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr: Nasr notes that “Orientalism” as a title is no longer very common in Western academic circles today. However, within the broader framework of “Eastern studies,” Iranology — including both the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods — holds a central place in many areas, from the Middle East to the Far East. In his view, this centrality is completely fundamental in Middle Eastern studies and even gains importance in some aspects of Far Eastern studies, especially in relation to China.

Professor Ian Almond: Almond begins by distinguishing between the two concepts of “Iran” and “Persia” and believes that these two words evoke two different worlds. He does not agree with the assumption that the “general Muslim East” has always ignored the specific cultural features of Iran; for example, for Goethe, the models of Hafez and Persian poetry were completely central. From his perspective, Europeans feel a kind of racial-linguistic affinity with Iran/Persia that cannot be repeated with the Semitic Arabic traditions. Nevertheless, Almond emphasizes a kind of “deliberate forgetting” of the complexity of contemporary Iran — its ethnic diversity, modernity, and internal class and gender tensions — which has been set aside in favor of a more uniform image of Iran as a religious, monotheistic, Persian-speaking, and conservative society. Even the most successful examples of Iranian popular culture outside the country (such as Kiarostami’s cinema or the graphic novel *Persepolis*) revolve around this same axis of contemporary Iran.

Dr. Nosratollah Rastegar: Rastegar considers Iranology the “hard core” and “methodological point of intersection” of classical and modern Oriental studies and demonstrates this centrality in three dimensions: first, comparative linguistics; the discovery of the Avestan and Old Persian languages by Orientalists such as William Jones provided the key to understanding the kinship of the Indo-European languages and their connection with Sanskrit. Second, institutional continuity; research in the *Cambridge History of Iran* shows that the Iranian plateau, as a civilizational crossroads, provided the structural framework for the continuity of administrative, bureaucratic, and commercial systems (including the Silk Road network) from ancient times to the Islamic period. Third, the production of religious knowledge; Iran, as the origin of independent syncretic religious systems such as Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, and Mazdakism, played an intermediary and explanatory model role between the Far East and the Abrahamic religions.

Dr. Gholamreza Aavani: Aavani, citing Diogenes Laertius, the ancient Greek historian, recalls that philosophy did not arise in Greece, but among the “barbarians,” and his first example in this regard is the Iranian Magi, whose antiquity reaches five thousand years before the fall of Troy and is contemporary with Zoroaster. According to Aavani, Aristotle also considered the Magi

even older than the Egyptians. He also refers to Plotinus, the founder of Neoplatonism, who, after eleven years of study in Alexandria, consciously joined the army of Emperor Gordian III solely with the aim of traveling toward Iran and becoming acquainted with the “philosophical doctrine of the Iranians.”

Professor Rüdiger Lohlker: Lohlker, focusing on the post-Mongol period and especially the Timurid era, argues that the Persian-speaking world (“the Persianate world”) was not a marginal element, but the vital and connecting core of thought in the Islamic world and the entire East. He considers Sain al-Din Ibn Turka of Isfahan a prominent example of the combination and systematization of the most complex intellectual schools of the Islamic world — the Akbarian mysticism of Ibn Arabi, the Peripatetic philosophy of Ibn Sina, and the Illuminationist wisdom of Suhrawardi — and believes that the authentic intellectual currents of the East reached convergence and structural perfection only in the Iranian context. He also refers to the formation of the “school of the investigators” (madhhab-e muhaqqiqin) in Iran: an epistemological approach that sought the scientific, intuitive, and mathematical realization of the reality of existence and turned Iran into a theoretical reference center.

Dr. Jaleh Amouzgar: Amouzgar develops her argument in two layers. In the first layer, with a general view based on the consensus of various fields — history, culture and literature, and archaeology — she concludes that thought in the cultural civilizational sphere of Iran has been both influential and influenced relative to the entire East; and that Iran has played a strong role in creating a platform for effective communication among civilizations, a prominent example of which is the Academy of Gundishapur. She emphasizes that the pure intellectual foundations of the Iranians should not be ignored, nor should their roots be sought solely elsewhere, or vice versa. In the second layer, with a more detailed view based on textual data from the ancient period, she enumerates at least four continuous axes that show the philosophical richness and structural role of Iran in human civilization: first, mythological connections — such as the structural affinity of the myth of Jamshid with the myths of China, Egypt, and Mesopotamia — which in her view are not accidental, but a sign of a “connected cultural system”; and second, the concept of “wisdom” (hikmat) in texts such as the third book of the Denkard (compiled in the third century AH on the basis of older teachings), which, with a precise distinction between “creation” — the potential existence of matter at the spiritual level, like a thread hidden in wool or a cup and crown hidden in gold and silver — and “bestowal” or material creation — the actualization of this potential and its transfer from the spiritual level to the material world — reveals a deep philosophical structuralism in Iranian wisdom.

Dr. Reza Gholami: Gholami defines the place of Iran in Oriental studies not as marginal, but as the “central and generative core” and demonstrates this centrality in five aspects. First, Iran is one of the four fundamental centers of human civilization: not merely a geographical area, but a gateway for understanding the course of the evolution of human civilization. Second, Iran has been an independent center of civilization creation; contrary to the common narrative that considers Mesopotamia the only origin of civilization, the discovery of Shahr-e Sukhteh and the column of Hammurabi’s laws in Susa show that the Iranian plateau was an equal partner and independent center in the creation of Eastern civilization. Third, Iranology in the constellation of Oriental studies is a “critical-epistemological knot” that prevents the homogenization and reductionism of the concept of “the East” in colonial narratives. Fourth, in the centrality of the production of Islamic science and culture: according to him, 65 to 75 percent of the scholars of the Islamic Golden Age — such as Khwarazmi, Ibn Sina, Farabi, and Biruni — had Iranian roots, and even the foundations of the sciences of the Arabic language (such as grammar, by

Sibawayh) were laid by Iranians. Fifth, Iran has been the innovator of global patterns of governance: from the Achaemenid period and with the Cyrus Cylinder, the first global experiment in “managing diversity” and cultural tolerance was presented, which later became a model for Eastern and Islamic empires.

3. The Possibility or Impossibility of Knowing the East Without Iranology

The second question directly addresses whether it is possible at all to properly study the East without considering Iranology and Iranian heritage.

Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr: Nasr provides a distinct answer among different regions of the East: in his view, the study of the Far East is largely possible independently of Iranology, although even there some elements of Iranology must be taken into account. But the study of India, West Asia, or Central Asia is by no means possible without attention to Iranology.

Professor Ian Almond: Almond examines this question in the form of moving beyond Arab-centrism and believes that the entry of the “Iranian civilizational sphere” (philosophy, mysticism, and its particular historical path) disrupts the uniform Orientalist Eurocentric image. He points to the closer connection of Persian religious-poetic traditions with the Hindu-Sanskrit world, as well as the overlap of a kind of “Persianate cosmopolitanism” (centered on figures such as Rumi and Jami), which creates a set of intercultural connections that cannot be achieved by focusing solely on Arabic-language traditions — except in the case of the Thousand and One Nights and its roots in the Panchatantra.

Dr. Nosratollah Rastegar: Rastegar gives a firmly negative answer: separating the East from Iranian heritage leads to reductionism and methodological errors. He considers the concept of the “Persianate World,” introduced by Marshall Hodgson in his classic work *The Venture of Islam*, the most fundamental theoretical framework of this discussion: from the tenth century CE, the cultural and linguistic identity of Iran (Persian-Islamic) became the dominant model in Central Asia, Anatolia (Ottoman), and the Indian subcontinent (Mughals). Therefore, analyzing the political, literary, artistic, and Sufi history of these vast regions is impossible without the epistemological tools of Iranology, because the Iranian language and worldview acted as the intermediary language of this territory.

Dr. Gholamreza Aavani: Aavani demonstrates this impossibility through the role of Iran in preserving and transmitting the classical heritage: when Justinian, the Byzantine emperor, closed the Academy of Plato in 529 CE, seven of the greatest non-Christian philosophers (including Damascius and Simplicius) took refuge at the court of Khosrow Anushirvan the Sasanian; he not only supported them, but also legally guaranteed their intellectual freedom in the peace treaty with Rome. The Academy of Gundishapur, founded by Shapur I, was a global center for the translation of Iranian, Greek, Syriac, and Indian texts into Middle Persian; this same institutional framework directly prepared the ground for the Abbasid translation movement (Bayt al-Hikma) in Baghdad, which took place with the support and execution of Iranian scholar-ministers.

Professor Rüdiger Lohlker: Lohlker also considers the answer firmly negative and emphasizes the transregional intellectual network known as the “Republic of Letters”: a vast network of

letterists and neo-Pythagoreans whose epistemological horizon extended from Mamluk Cairo and Ottoman Anatolia, through Iran and Central Asia, to the Indian subcontinent. Since the prominent figures of this international current (such as Ibn Turka) were active in cities such as Isfahan, Yazd, and Shiraz, any attempt to understand this vast Eastern network without its Iranian center remains incomplete and insufficient. He also recalls that the mystical, philosophical, and esoteric approaches (such as letterism) that were theorized in Iran were tools of legitimacy for the great Eastern empires — Timurids, Safavids, Ottomans, and Mughals of India — and the formulation of their political self-awareness; and without Iranology, the ideological roots of the legitimacy of governments in the East also remain incomprehensible.

Dr. Jaleh Amouzgar: Amouzgar, continuing the same two-layered argument, explicitly concludes that the existence of these intellectual exchanges — which often occurred in scientific, commercial, political contexts or even in regional conflicts — shows that the possibility of designing precise Oriental studies without considering the central role of Iran is very weak. She strengthens this claim with her fourth reference regarding the role of thinkers such as Mani: Mani, by traveling to various lands, translated Iranian wisdom into Sogdian, Chinese, and Ghorī languages and institutionalized it as far as the Far East. In Amouzgar's view, this heritage shows that even the understanding of ancient Greek philosophy, according to researchers such as Dr. Fathollah Mojtaba'i (in the book *The Beautiful City of Plato and the Ideal Iranian King in Antiquity*), remains incomplete without attention to Iranian wisdom.

Dr. Reza Gholami: Gholami emphasizes with greater firmness than the other respondents that Oriental studies and Islamic studies without Iranology are not only “incomplete,” but “structurally defective” and impossible, and expands this claim in four axes. First, the loss of coherence and meaning: Oriental studies without Iranology loses its own coherence and meaning, because Iran is one of the central pillars of the East, and ignoring it deprives the entire field of the capacity for logical understanding. Second, the deep interweaving of Iran and Islam: Islamic studies without the tools that Iranology provides are impossible, because Iranians, relying on their ancient bureaucratic capacities, turned the message of Islam from a simple structure into a complex civilization. Third, the Persian language as epistemological infrastructure: in his view, Persian was not merely a means of communication, but the “epistemological infrastructure” of Eastern civilization and the intermediary bureaucratic and scientific language of Asia for eight centuries; understanding the history of India, Central Asia, and the Ottoman Empire is impossible without mastery of this language. Fourth, Shiite studies as a pillar of Islamic studies: knowing the East without knowing Shiism — whose jurisprudential and philosophical center of gravity was established in Iran — is not possible; because Shiite jurisprudence, by keeping the “door of ijtihad” open, has guaranteed the intellectual dynamism of Islamic civilization.

4. Shortcomings and Research Gaps Resulting from the Neglect of Iran

The third question addresses the practical consequences of removing Iran from Oriental studies.

Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr: Nasr believes that these shortcomings are so numerous that it is not possible to list them all; for example, it is enough to consider the study of northern India without attention to the Persian language to reveal the depth of this gap.

Professor Ian Almond: Almond addresses the role of the Persian literary heritage and its historical “world-city” in shaping transregional cultural networks in the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal worlds. In his view, the most important achievement of paying attention to this heritage is that it challenges the common understanding of “cosmopolitanism,” which has always considered it a confrontation with the West or a confrontation between Europe and non-Europe. The Persian literary heritage provides rich examples of interaction and exchange among non-Western cultures, without it necessarily being required that this exchange pass through London, Berlin, Paris, or Rome.

Dr. Nosratollah Rastegar: Rastegar enumerates three serious epistemological gaps. First, the rupture in the understanding of Islamic civilization: based on the argument of Richard Frye in *The Golden Age of Iran*, ignoring the Iranian contribution reduces Islamic civilization to a purely Arab phenomenon and conceals the origin of the House of Wisdom, the rational sciences (Ibn Sina and Farabi), theology, Sufism, and even the compilation of Arabic grammar (by scholars such as Sibawayh). Second, the construction of a false dichotomy in ancient history: without Iranology, the political and diplomatic dynamics of Rome and Byzantium remain incomprehensible, because their main rivals — the Parthians and Sasanians — are removed from the equation. Third, anamorphosis (distortion) in the history of Eastern art: the absence of authentic Iranian patterns in architecture (such as the chaharbagh and advanced domes) and the art of the book leads the genealogy of Islamic-Indian and Ottoman art to an analytical dead end.

Dr. Gholamreza Aavani: Aavani, citing Ibn Khaldun in the *Muqaddimah*, recalls that the rational sciences reached the Greeks from the Iranians, and that almost all the founders of the transmitted sciences — Arabic grammar, jurisprudence, theology, Quranic interpretation, hadith, and history — were Iranian or of Iranian descent; Ibn Khaldun confirms this claim with the famous hadith “If knowledge were suspended from the Pleiades, the Iranians would reach it.” He also refers to Hegel, who considers Iran the birthplace of the first truly universal empire; an empire that brought heterogeneous nations together under one government while at the same time allowing each to preserve its own individuality, culture, and particular laws. According to Aavani, Hegel, citing Herodotus, recalls that the ancient Iranians rejected the anthropomorphism of the gods and never worshipped idols, while at the same time displaying an unprecedented level of religious tolerance toward all religions. Aavani concludes that attempting Oriental studies without Iranology leaves an empty gap in the history of philosophy, breaks the chain of scientific transmission from antiquity to the Islamic Golden Age, and prevents the understanding of the historical roots of universal governance and cultural pluralism in the East.

Professor Rüdiger Lohlker: Lohlker enumerates three gaps. First, the incorrect interpretation of history as a period of decline: ignoring the intellectual dynamism of Iran in the post-Mongol period leads many Orientalists to the error of calling this period “the stagnation and decline of Islamic thought”; whereas examination of Iranian texts shows that this period was in fact a period of deep critical rereading of previous schools (such as the rereading of Ibn Sina’s thought by Khwaja Nasir al-Din Tusi and Ibn Turka). Second, the rupture in the understanding of the “epistemological turn” of the East: in the ninth century AH (fifteenth century CE), a metaphysics based on the primacy of the “Book” and a mathematical-letterist worldview took shape in the East; regardless of the written heritage of Iran, this fundamental turn — which also influenced Ottoman, Mamluk, and Indian thought — remains hidden from view. Third, the remaining unknown of the complementary methodology of reason and intuition: thinkers of the Iranian cultural sphere produced a unique combination of the simultaneous application of “reason” and “mystical unveiling”; without this model, Oriental studies loses a decisive hermeneutical key for

understanding the lived world of the East. Lohlker concludes that the Persianate world has acted as an “intellectual hub”; and without this axis, the chain links that connect the western Islamic world (Egypt and the Ottoman Empire) to its eastern part (Central Asia and India) break apart.

Dr. Jaleh Amouzgar: Amouzgar shows the gap resulting from neglect in the central place of “wisdom” (khrad) in the Gathic teachings: according to these teachings, wisdom is the extraterrestrial essence of Ohrmazd and the driving force of the administration of the world, while Ahriman, due to the absence of this very wisdom, has no place in the structure of existence except destruction; and in the Hormazd Yasht, Ohrmazd introduces himself as the source of knowledge, awareness, and wisdom. In her view, ignoring this rationalism in Oriental studies leads to the reduction of Iranian civilization to a purely mythological-mystical civilization; whereas its real foundation has been a coherent rationality and constructive wisdom by means of which the Iranians were able to preserve their administrative and scientific structures over the centuries.

Dr. Reza Gholami: Gholami, unlike the other respondents who describe the gaps resulting from the removal of Iran mainly at the methodological level, calls this phenomenon an “academic color-blindness” and expands it in four aspects. First, the phenomenon of “double erasure”: Western academics, by erasing “Iran” in favor of Arab-centered narratives, and erasing “Shiism” in favor of Sunni readings, have created a blank and dark space on the map of Oriental studies that paralyzes the understanding of the truth of Eastern history. Second, the dominance of ideological confrontation over scientific neutrality: in his view, ignoring Iran is usually not a simple scientific error, but often an ideological project; from the divisive policies of the British and Russian empires, to pan-Arabist and pan-Turkist approaches, and also the politicized and security-oriented outlook of some Western academics after 1979, all have acted with political motives in the direction of diminishing the civilizational identity of Iran. Third, the loss of mechanisms of civilizational continuity: without Iranology, researchers will not be able to understand subtle mechanisms such as the “Civilizational Genome Theory”; mechanisms that show how an Eastern civilization has been able, relying on its ancient language and institutions, to resist destructive ruptures and reproduce a new identity. Fourth, the inversion of historical reality: any image of the East that pushes authentic Shiite and Iranian intellectual traditions — from the pure Imams to the theological school of Shaykh Mufid and the Transcendent Wisdom of Mulla Sadra — to the margins has distorted historical reality; and the censorship or sanctioning of Iranian texts and achievements for contemporary political reasons is, in Gholami’s view, a clear violation of academic ethics.

5. Comparative Analysis: Points of Intersection and Distinction of Views

A review of the views of the seven respondents above, despite differences in specialized backgrounds — Islamic philosophy and wisdom (Nasr and Aavani), comparative literature and postcolonial studies (Almond), Iranology and historical linguistics (Rastegar), post-Mongol Islamic studies (Lohlker), mythology and ancient Iranian languages (Amouzgar), and contemporary strategic studies of Iranology (Gholami) — reaches a significant convergence on four axes. This convergence must be read with caution: all the respondents already believed in the centrality of Iran in Oriental studies, and the voice of a critic of this centrality is not represented among them; therefore, what follows is the convergence within a like-minded group, not a consensus that covers the full spectrum of competing views in this field.

a) Distinct centrality according to region and period: Nasr and Rastegar both emphasize that the centrality of Iranology is not uniform and identical, but varies in intensity depending on the region (India, Central Asia, Anatolia versus the Far East) and the period (ancient, post-Mongol, middle Islamic); but in none of these areas is the complete removal of Iran possible. Amouzgar documents this same centrality with more detailed textual evidence from the ancient period (myth, Denkard wisdom, and the concept of wisdom in the Gathas), and Gholami formulates this centrality in a broader concept: Iran is not a region alongside other regions, but one of the four fundamental centers of the whole of human civilization; a claim that elevates the scope of centrality from the regional level of Oriental studies to the level of the global history of civilization.

b) The mediating and connecting role of Iran: Aavani (through Gundishapur and the sheltering of the philosophers of the Academy of Plato), Rastegar (through Hodgson's concept of the Persianate world), Lohlker (through the network of the Republic of Letters), and Gholami (through the concept of the Persian language as "epistemological infrastructure" and the intermediary bureaucratic language of Asia for eight centuries) independently emphasize the same central idea: Iran is not a single geographical region, but a hub and intermediary for the transmission of knowledge among Eastern and Western civilizations. This agreement among four respondents with completely different backgrounds is noteworthy, although it naturally cannot replace independent evidence and judgments outside this survey.

c) The epistemological cost of removing Iran from the Islamic sciences: Rastegar, Aavani, and Gholami, each independently of the others and citing different sources — respectively Richard Frye, Ibn Khaldun, and statistics related to the origins of the scholars of the Islamic Golden Age — arrive at the same fundamental argument: reducing Islamic civilization to a purely Arab phenomenon conceals the origin of the rational and transmitted sciences (from philosophy and theology to Arabic grammar and jurisprudence). Gholami, in addition, also presents Shiite studies as a separate pillar of this same argument, which was not explicitly present in the responses of the other professors. The convergence of these three sources strengthens this argument at first glance; however, because all three come from a closely related tradition in evaluating the role of Iran in Islamic civilization, this convergence should be regarded as a sign of a shared intellectual current, not an independent proof from sources that lie completely outside this current.

d) The tension between two types of ideological concern: In the midst of this, two voices from two opposing directions highlight the ideological dimension of the discussion and complement each other. Almond warns that emphasis on the centrality of Iran should not lead to the reproduction of a uniform and romantic image of "Persia" that ignores the complexity, ethnic diversity, and social tensions of contemporary Iran; his concern is directed at the danger of the ideologization of the Iran-centered discourse itself. In the opposite direction, Gholami argues that the removal or diminution of Iran in Western academies has itself often been the product of ideological and political motives — from colonial policies to pan-Arabist, pan-Turkist approaches, and security considerations after 1979; his concern is directed at the ideologization of the process of removal itself. These two warnings, side by side, provide a more balanced picture: both the recognition of Iran's centrality must remain immune from falling into stereotyping, and the denial or diminution of it must not hide non-scientific motives behind the claim of "academic neutrality."

6. Conclusion

A summary of the views of the seven respondents shows that, according to the majority of them, studying the East without Iranology is, at least for the major part of this territory — from India and Central Asia to Anatolia, the classical Islamic world, and even European intellectual currents influenced by Iranian wisdom — not only incomplete, but in many cases impossible. This centrality can be documented at five levels: at the linguistic and historical level (connection with the Indo-European language family, institutional continuity of the Iranian plateau, and the role of the Persian language as the intermediary language and epistemological infrastructure of Asia); at the philosophical and wisdom level (from the Magi and the later Platonists to the synthesis of Ibn Turka, the school of the investigators, and Denkard wisdom); at the religious level (Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Achaemenid religious tolerance, the concept of wisdom in the Gathas, and the place of Shiism in the intellectual continuity of Islam); at the political-civilizational level (the model of the universal empire, the Cyrus Cylinder, and the networks of governmental legitimacy); and at a level that was clearly formulated only in Dr. Gholami's response, the ideological-political level of the research process itself, that is, the possibility that the removal or marginalization of Iran from Oriental studies has itself sometimes been the product of non-scientific motives, not merely a neutral methodological shortcoming.

Nevertheless, and as Almond reminds us from the other side, the recognition of this centrality must be accompanied by sensitivity to the internal complexity and diversity of Iran, both in the past and in the present, so that it does not itself become stereotyping or another tool in the same ideological dispute. The result of this survey is a picture of a relatively unanimous opinion among seven specialists, each of whom has arrived at the centrality of Iran in Oriental studies from a different angle. However, since the respondents of this survey naturally inclined toward this centrality and the voices of critics of this view are not represented in it, this summary should be regarded as a precise report of a particular intellectual spectrum, not a final and impartial judgment about the entire field of Oriental studies; a more complete evaluation of this question will require dialogue with the critical voices of this centrality as well.

Appendix: Brief Introduction of the Respondents

- Seyyed Hossein Nasr — Prominent philosopher and Islamic scholar, University Professor Emeritus of Islamic Studies at George Washington University, Washington, D.C.
- Ian Almond — Professor of World Literature at Georgia State University, researcher in Islamic studies, comparative literature, and postcolonial studies.
- Nosratollah Rastegar — Iranologist and researcher of Persian language and literature; retired researcher at the Institute of Iranian Studies of the Austrian Academy of Sciences.
- Gholamreza Aavani — Philosopher, professor of Islamic philosophy and wisdom, former president of the Iranian Association of Philosophy and Wisdom, and prominent researcher of the Iranian wisdom tradition.
- Rüdiger Lohker — Islamic scholar, retired professor (Univ.-Prof. i.R.) of Islamic Studies at the Institute of Oriental Studies, University of Vienna; researcher of the history of Islamic thought, Islamic mysticism, and contemporary Islam.
- Jaleh Amouzgar — Iranologist, mythologist, and linguist; retired professor of ancient culture and languages at the University of Tehran and permanent member of the Academy of Persian Language and Literature.
- Reza Gholami — Researcher and writer in the fields of Iranology, civilizational studies, and political philosophy; assistant professor at the Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, Tehran, Iran.