

British Persian Studies and the Celebrations of the 2500th Anniversary of the Founding of the Persian Empire in 1971

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Robert Steele

School of Arts, Languages and Cultures

Abstract

The aim of this dissertation is to investigate British academia's engagement with the Celebrations of the 2500th Anniversary of the Founding of the Persian Empire that took place in 1971. The Celebrations are commonly studied in the context of the excesses of the Shah's regime, yet they have been subject to very little research in and of themselves. This dissertation breaks this trend and looks in detail at the cultural and academic aspects of the event, which it argues were at the very heart of the Celebrations. This is done by studying the involvement of British academics and institutions, exploring their historic engagement with Iran and the Pahlavi dynasty, before considering their role in the Celebrations. Thereby this dissertation will answer some fundamental questions as to the nature of the Celebrations, as well as the cultural relationship between Britain and Iran during the period in question.

A wide range of primary sources were used to answer the principal questions of this thesis, such as official government programmes, exhibition catalogues, academic publications, unpublished archive documents, newspaper articles and oral histories. These have been used to present the Celebrations, not as an elaborate show of pomposity, but as a unique event that encouraged academic and cultural programmes worldwide. Questions as to why the Imperial Court were keen to encourage such scholarly undertakings will be explored in this dissertation, as well as why academic institutions worldwide, particularly in Britain, were eager to engage with the Iranians. It concludes that the academic aspects were a crucial part of the Anniversary Celebrations and left an important and enduring legacy.

<https://www.escholar.manchester.ac.uk/api/datastream?publicationPid=uk-ac-man-scw:258600&datastreamId=FULL-TEXT.PDF>