

Thirty Years of *Iran and the Caucasus*: Scholarship, Memory, and Devotion

Reflections along the Way

As *Iran and the Caucasus* enters its 30th year of publication, we mark not merely the passage of time but the consolidation of an intellectual project that has matured through sustained scholarly vision, methodological rigour, and an enduring commitment to dialogue. Thirty years represent, in the life of an academic journal, a full generation of scholarship—long enough for paradigms to rise and fall, for disciplines to redefine themselves, and for entire geopolitical and cultural landscapes to be transformed. That *Iran and the Caucasus* has not only endured but flourished throughout these transformations is both a cause for reflection and a reason for gratitude.

Founded in 1997, at a moment of profound political and epistemological transition, the journal emerged in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, when long-restricted archives became accessible, intellectual borders were redrawn, and entire regions demanded renewed scholarly attention. Yet, the intellectual cartography of the Iranian and Caucasian worlds lagged behind political change. At a time when existing academic frameworks were often fragmented along disciplinary, linguistic, or national lines, *Iran and the Caucasus* was conceived as a response to this fragmentation: a platform that would reunite fields artificially separated by modern academic specialisation and restore historical depth to the study of a region whose coherence long preceded modern borders.

From its inception, the journal has been guided by a fundamental conviction: that the Iranian and Caucasian worlds constitute not merely adjacent regions, but historically interwoven cultural, linguistic, and civilisational spaces. Their interactions—political, religious, linguistic, and symbolic—extend across millennia, from antiquity to the present. To study one without the other is to risk analytical distortion. The journal, therefore, adopted an explicitly interdisciplinary and transregional orientation, welcoming contributions that crossed conventional boundaries between history and linguistics, archaeology and anthropology, philology and ethnography.

Over the past three decades, *Iran and the Caucasus* has published research spanning ancient, mediaeval, early modern, and modern periods. Articles on

ancient history and archaeology have explored the material and textual foundations of early Iranian and Caucasian societies, reassessing imperial formations, local polities, and systems of belief. Studies of mediaeval history have illuminated confessional cultures, dynastic networks, legal traditions, and intellectual exchanges that shaped the region's long Middle Ages. Early modern and modern contributions have traced processes of transformation, rupture, and adaptation under imperial expansion, colonial encounter, nationalism, and ideological reconfiguration.

Philology has always occupied a central place in the journal's profile. The Iranian and Caucasian linguistic domains—rich in diversity and historical depth—offer unparalleled insight into processes of language contact, convergence, and divergence. Contributions have addressed historical phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon, and semantics, while also engaging with sociolinguistics, dialectology, and language ideology. Philological studies of manuscripts, inscriptions, and textual traditions have revealed layers of intellectual history that transcend modern national narratives.

Equally significant has been the journal's sustained engagement with ethnography, ethnology, and anthropology. These contributions have documented social structures, ritual practices, oral traditions, and systems of belief, often among communities whose voices remain underrepresented in mainstream scholarship. In doing so, *Iran and the Caucasus* has functioned not only as a site of analysis but also as a repository of cultural memory, preserving knowledge that might otherwise be lost to modernisation, displacement, or political marginalisation.

One of the journal's distinctive achievements lies in its integrative methodological ethos. Rather than privileging any single discipline, it has encouraged dialogue among them. Archaeological data are read in conversation with historical geography; linguistic evidence informs ethnographic interpretation; textual analysis is complemented by fieldwork. This integrative approach reflects a broader epistemological stance: that complex historical regions demand equally complex analytical tools.

Throughout its history, the journal has also served as a space of critical reassessment. Numerous contributions have challenged inherited paradigms—colonial classifications, nationalist historiographies, ideologically driven narratives, and essentialist models of identity. By foregrounding hybridity, historical contingency, and cultural entanglement, the journal has contributed to a more nuanced understanding of the Iranian and Caucasian worlds as dynamic, plural, and internally diverse.

The international character of *Iran and the Caucasus* has been one of its defining strengths. From its earliest volumes, the journal brought together

scholars from different academic traditions, generations, and regions. Its multilingual orientation—primarily English, but also French and German—has facilitated genuine transnational dialogue and ensured the circulation of scholarship beyond linguistic boundaries. In this sense, the journal has acted as a bridge not only between regions, but also between scholarly cultures.

As a chronicle of scholarship, the journal also reflects broader transformations within the humanities and social sciences. Early volumes were marked by the urgency of documentation and foundational research; later issues increasingly engaged with theoretical reflection, comparative frameworks, and reflexive methodologies. Yet, throughout these shifts, the journal has remained anchored in empirical rigor, respect for sources, and editorial exactitude.

The 30th anniversary is, therefore, not merely retrospective. It is an invitation to reaffirm continuity through renewal. New generations of scholars now approach the Iranian and Caucasian worlds through digital humanities, collaborative fieldwork, and global comparative perspectives. *Iran and the Caucasus* stands well positioned to remain a vital platform for these emerging conversations, while remaining faithful to its founding principles.

No academic journal endures without a community: *Iran and the Caucasus* owes its longevity to the dedication of its authors, reviewers, associate editors, editorial staff, and readers. Each contribution, each peer review, each critical exchange has shaped the journal's identity. These *Reflections* are dedicated to all who have participated in this collective intellectual endeavour over the past thirty years.

As we look ahead, we do so with confidence grounded in experience. The Iranian and Caucasian worlds will continue to challenge simplistic narratives and demand scholarly attentiveness. May *Iran and the Caucasus* continue to illuminate their histories, languages, and cultures; to question inherited certainties; and to cultivate dialogue across disciplinary, linguistic, and geographical boundaries. Standing at these thresholds of dialogue, the journal enters its fourth decade with the same commitment that animated its first: to scholarship as an act of intellectual responsibility and cultural understanding.

From the very outset, my vision was to create a journal modelled on the classical scholarly periodicals of the 19th and early 20th centuries, especially those of the German-speaking academic world. A particular point of reference for me was *Wörter und Sachen*, and I believe that I have succeeded, at least in part, in realising this ideal. Looking back now, I can see that *Iran and the Caucasus* as a whole meets the parameters of those classical journals to which I aspired.

What does this mean in concrete terms? Above all, it implies the consistent and unwavering observance of the principle of historicism across all publications. Those who have followed the work of the journal will surely have

noticed that this principle is rigourously maintained even in articles dealing with strictly contemporary issues, including socio-political developments in the region in our own time. We have always avoided publishing works devoted to the direct analysis of current events, as such materials tend to resemble journalistic commentary and are ill-suited to an academic periodical. When accepting contributions on recent or contemporary topics, we have invariably required authors to examine the phenomena in a diachronic perspective, that is, to trace the deep historical roots of present-day developments.

It goes without saying that the remaining materials, which constitute the lion's share of each issue—archaeology, history, early history, culture, ethnography, cultural history, comparative philology, linguistics, and related fields—are systematically grounded in the historical approach and the comparative-historical method. As for the review section, we naturally highlighted works that were written in accordance with the parameters outlined above.

From the very beginning, an impressive Editorial Board was formed around the journal, comprising prominent scholars who, to the best of their abilities, supported me both with advice and with practical assistance. I am deeply grateful to each of them. In tribute and remembrance of the members of the Editorial Board who have passed away over the years, their names are perpetually honoured in the pages of the journal: my teacher Vladimir Aronovich Livshits, Muhammad Abdulqadirovich Dandamaev, Ehsan Yarshater, Bert Fragner, Wolfgang Schultze, George Bournoutyan ...

The past thirty years have not been a time of calm—neither for me personally, nor for my people, nor for my country, Armenia. However, none of the circumstances—including war—has ever affected either the quality of the journal's academic output, or its publication regularity (which has grown from a single issue to five issues per year), or any other aspect of the work of our team. Every achievement of *Iran and the Caucasus* has been driven solely by dedication, while the journal itself has always remained a source of inspiration for all who are connected with it.

Last but not least, I would like to acknowledge those who, over the course of thirty years, at different times have stood by me as devoted friends and companions. First and foremost, among them are Prof. Dr. Victoria Arakelova, Prof. Dr. Uwe Bläsing, Dr. Matthias Weinreich, and my former students, Dr. Gohar Hakobian and Dr. Amir Zeighami to be particularly mentioned here. I am, of course, grateful to Brill Publishers (now De Gruyter Brill), the publishing house that has brought our journal into the global scholarly arena. I would also like to single out the current representative of the Publishers, Dr. Abdurraouf Oueslati—a most gracious individual, a kind and responsive colleague, who consistently supports and assists us in all our endeavours.

Most recently, together with Dr. Oueslati we established the *Iran and the Caucasus* Monograph Series under the auspices of the journal, which has already gained international recognition by publishing highly valuable monographic works by Orientalists of both older and newer generations.

Thirty years is, of course, a milestone—and for a journal, it is an entire lifetime. Within the global field of Oriental studies, I can recall a few academic journals that have crossed this threshold (such as *ZDMG*, *WZKM*, *BSOAS*, *JA*, *JAOS*, and some others). It appears that *Iran and the Caucasus* is well on its way to joining this distinguished list of long-standing journals.

As the journal enters its fourth decade, we do so with gratitude to God and to all who have contributed, and with the optimism for the scholarship yet to come.

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