

Krzysztof Ulanowski

The Iranian heritage

Conference report: “Colloquia Baltica Iranica”, Rzucewo, 16–17 października 2014

The purpose of the conference series entitled “Colloquia Baltica Iranica” is to enable Polish scholars principally interested in Iranian archaeology, but also in other disciplines such as history, anthropology and philology, to meet with their Iranian and Western European counterparts.

The initial conference was intended to be the first in an annual series, each a themed meeting. The theme of the first colloquium was “Poland, Europe, Iran”. This was intended to give as wide a scope as possible to non-Polish participants, allowing papers to deal with contact between Iran and Europe, as well as purely Iranian themes. Among the participants were several internationally renowned scholars, but also two young speakers who had yet to graduate their MAs. The conference entitled “Colloquia Baltica Iranica” deliberately excludes the name Gdańsk because it is not envisaged that future conferences will be held exclusively in Gdańsk. The conference was organized by the Historical Faculty of Gdansk University, and first and foremost by the Iran Heritage Foundation. The main organizers were Professor Nicholas Sekunda and Dr Marcin Paszke.

The emphasis of the conference was on the pre-Islamic period, but a number of papers dealt with topics drawn from the Islamic period.

The keynote speaker was Dr J.E. Curtis, OBE, FBA, CEO of the Iran Heritage Foundation, who gave a lecture on the Persian period at Nimrud. His lecture was full of details and conclusions drawn from recent excavations. His excellent paper proved the importance of participation in international projects, excavations and access to the latest international professional, academic literature. Two lectures given by Iranian scholars were connected with Achaemenid politics and archaeological excavations. Originally, five more speakers were invited to attend from Iran itself, but only two ultimately participated in the conference; this is an area for future development going forward with the project. Speakers from Gdansk University gave lectures referring to Mesopotamia (Drs Paszke and Ulanowski),

the symbolism of the falcon and attire (the latter two presentations being given by Prof. Sekunda). The interesting and little known problem of Poles in Iran during the Second World War was presented by Prof. Kłoczyński. Guest speakers from St. Petersburg focused on archaeological and architectural problems and showed reconstructions of ancient cities and computer graphics in 3D. Dr Luciano from Naples explained the difference between the cults of Mithras and the Persian martyrs. A large group of scholars were interested in Parthian and Sassanid aspects of Persian history, societies and art. The high points of the conference were the detailed discussions and nuanced considerations surrounding the papers, which came from a range of different points of view.

The long discussions, unresolved dilemmas and a number of new ideas have shown that the conference proved not only to be an interesting one-time prospect, but an event that will certainly enjoy ongoing fruitful continuation.