In the academic world, Bert G. Fragner (27 November 1941–16 December 2021) was an outstanding personality in many ways. He was a scholar of stupendous intellectual range and erudition, a great conversationalist, a selfless advocate, an incomparable storyteller, and a generous host.

Bert Fragner studied Islamic studies, social anthropology, and a variety of philologies (Arabic, Turkish, Iranian, and Slavic studies) at the University of Vienna. In 1965, a scholarship took him to Tehran, where he remained until 1969, teaching for several years at a vocational school. During this period, his broad interests focused on Iran and its history and culture. Moreover, the years in Tehran laid the foundation for a mastery of the Persian language that was second to none and fostered a deep understanding of the country and its people.

He obtained his Ph.D. in Vienna in 1970, writing his dissertation on the medieval urban history of Hamadan (published 1972) and completed his habilitation in Freiburg in 1977 with a thesis on Qajar memoirs (published 1979). In 1985, he was appointed Chair of Iranian Studies at the Free University of Berlin. Four years later, in 1989, he became Professor of Iranian Studies at the University of Bamberg, where he expanded the newly-established discipline and turned Bamberg into a well-known center of Iranology on the international academic map. He returned to his native Vienna in 2003, where he served as founding director of the Institute of Iranian Studies at the Austrian Academy of Sciences until his retirement in 2010. Within a short time, the Institute became a vibrant research center for Iranian studies worldwide.

It is almost impossible to adequately describe Bert Fragner’s scholarly œuvre in its wealth of topics, diversity of methods, and intellectual breadth. He was a generalist in the best sense of the word, conclusively combining and interweaving comprehensive perspectives and case analyses. His work includes a broad range of global, cultural, social, administrative, and economic histories incorporating politics, religion, literature, and, last but not least, culinary arts.
and history, where scholarly interests merged with personal passion and practical realization.

His research covered Iranian history in all periods of the Islamic era. He was particularly interested in the Mongol and Safavid periods with regard to Iran's integration into large-scale geopolitical contexts and the formation of a historically shaped notion of Iran. His work on diplomatic, administrative, and economic history was based on an interest in the concrete foundations of social orders and the functional mechanisms of political power structures. On current political events, about which he was always very well informed, he commented less in terms of ideological debates than with a focus on their specific historical, economic, and administrative contexts. This approach is illustrated, for instance, in an article published in 1983 in which he examined ʿolamāʾ-state relations from the Safavid period to the Islamic Revolution by analyzing the institutional and administrative structures that paved the way for the clerical takeover in 1979. As early as the 1970s, he directed his scholarly attention to Central Asia and was instrumental in establishing Central Asian studies as an integral part of the field of Iranian studies. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, he reflected in historical depth on the complicated independence processes of the Central Asian states. Many of his later works deal with longue durée phenomena, macro-historical, transregional, and global historical perspectives.

In several topical fields, his studies have proposed and brought about significant paradigm shifts. Based on territorial and hegemonial conceptions, he identified (1997) the Il-khanid period as a root of the notion of Iranian identity and territoriality. He coined (1999) the term “Persophoni” to characterize the Persian language in its long-term historical function as a transregional contact language that created a common, large-scale, dynamic, and polycentric cultural context. This perspective overrides Iranocentric approaches and overlaps to some extent with Marshall Hodgson's concept of the “Persianate,” which has been eponymous to this journal and its affiliated scholarly association and has sparked a large body of recent research in the field of Iranian studies. Bert Fragner continued his scholarly activities even after retirement and was able to complete major projects, such as a chapter on the literary aspects of Persian historiography in the fifth volume of A History of Persian Literature (2021).

Bert Fragner was a visionary not only in his research. Whilst carrying out his scholarly work, he always kept a close eye on the actual financial and administrative conditions of academic life. He worked tirelessly and successfully to establish Iranian studies as an independent academic subject in the German-speaking countries, where they had been—except for the ancient and linguistic
branches—fairly marginalized within the framework of Islamic studies. He was a board member of several academic associations (and a member of the editorial board of this journal), using his strategic mind, wit, and determination to promote the sustainable establishment and growth of Iranian studies. The fact that the field has developed into an internationally recognized academic discipline in Germany and Austria is, to a large extent, due to Bert Fragner.

No less important to him was the exchange with students and young scholars, whom he supported wholeheartedly. Many of his former students are now scholars and instructors themselves. He prepared the ground on which everyone could develop their interests and abilities. Intellectual vanity or haughtiness were completely foreign to him. He shared his knowledge and ideas without reserve and, to those who sought his advice, he would often open up new perspectives. His ability to boil down complicated contexts and frame them in a comprehensible way also made Bert Fragner a sought-after speaker and discussant beyond academia.

Many friends and colleagues around the globe have their personal memories of the generous hospitality they enjoyed with Bert Fragner and his wife Christa, who always stood by him in his many activities. Inspiring conversations unfolded over great food and in a relaxed and stimulating atmosphere. He was a marvelous storyteller and had a phenomenal memory for anecdotes and aphorisms (if he did not create them himself!). His wit and *joie de vivre* were combined with a great sense of responsibility and respect. Bert Fragner loved life and lived intensively. He died shortly after his eightieth birthday, still too early for all of us who miss his humor, erudition, and wisdom.

**Bibliography**

*A full bibliography of Bert Fragner’s publications appears on the website of the Austrian Academy of Sciences: https://www.oeaw.ac.at/en/iran/institute/staff/former-staff-members/bert-g-fragner.*


