AFTERWORD

It is, perhaps, inevitable that a series of five lectures given on diverse aspects of a particular domain, in this case kinship, do not lend themselves to a convenient, all-encompassing conclusion. This study began with the potential spread of diverse ceramic styles via exogamous marriage patterns and has concluded by examining heraldic devices as individual and family markers. Examples of these and other social practices across several millennia have been interrogated using insights from the rich literature of social anthropology and, occasionally, comparative law. Some practices, deemed aberrant or exceptional, have been shown to reflect patterns that are attested all over the world, across space and time. Yet the aim was never to single out a practice, pair it with a similar one from another cultural context, and thereby uncover a hidden relationship, as a nineteenth-century diffusionist might have done. Rather, it was simply to demonstrate that practices like the preferential marriage patterns of Achaemenid royalty or the privileged position of the sister's son in Elamite royal succession have very real analogues in both ancient and modern societies and were not exceptional but can be accounted for through recourse to the anthropological literature.

The point here has been to underscore the fact that the peoples of ancient Iran, in all periods, may be productively considered through the same lens used to view any culture, and the surest means to arriving at a better comprehension of the social practices of the past is to tap the vast body of social anthropological and historical literature that has been growing for more than two centuries. Archaeologists and historians who focus too strictly on material remains, literary production, or religious ideology risk ignoring the salient features of kinship relations in ancient Iran. This is not a call to privilege the views of anthropologists over

those who study the tangible, literary, epigraphic, and archaeological records of the past. It is, rather, a challenge to treat the Iranian evidence with the full arsenal of analytical tools at our disposal. Unlike F. W. König, who seemed to exult in his rejection of comparative anthropological data when discussing the sister's son in ancient Elamite, we have no excuse for not recognizing that the answers to many of the questions that fascinate us are there, if we only make an effort to look for them in the right places. Finding those answers requires casting a wide net and that means, by definition, moving out of the confines of one's own specialty. This requires an open mind, curiosity, patience, and perseverance. Scholars of the twenty-first century benefit every day from the use of search engines and the availability of millions upon millions of pages of searchable, digitized scholarly books and articles, making it easier than ever to uncover comparative material that can help illuminate the most intractable historical problems. Our understanding of Iranian antiquity can advance in directions that are today unknowable, and were yesterday almost unthinkable, when barriers between fields are struck down and the horizons of our inquiry are truly opened up. This presents a challenge for those who have an aversion to leaving their comfort zone, but for others, it provides a road map to a far more exciting way of approaching the past than most of our illustrious academic forebears ever could have envisioned. That, after all is said and done, is what makes scholarship worth pursuing.