پانزدهمین کنفرانس دوسالانهٔ انجمن ایران‌پژوهی

The Fifteenth Biennial Iranian Studies Conference

Program Committee co-chairs: **Professor Dominic Parviz Brookshaw** (Oxford)
and **Professor Asghar Seyed-Gohrab** (Utrecht)

5-8 August 2026, Utrecht University *Utrecht, The Netherlands*

Organized by The Association for Iranian Studies in collaboration with The Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Utrecht University

Association for Iranian Studies انجمن ایران‌پژوهی
Universiteit Utrecht
erc European Research Council

Fifteenth Biennial

Iranian Studies Conference

5-8 August 2026, Utrecht University

CONFERENCE

PROGRAMME + ABSTRACTS

Association for
Iranian Studies
انجمن ایران‌پژوهی

Utrecht
University

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Wednesday, August 5th – Schedule

Dom Church (Domkerk),
Domplein 31, Utrecht

13:00-17:00	**Registration**	Dom Church (Noordertransept)
14:00-14:30	**Opening Remarks** Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, co-chair of programme committee Dominic Parviz Brookshaw, president of AIS and co-chair of programme committee	Dom Church
14:30-14:45	**Rokus de Groot, musical composition "The Excuse of the Nightingale"** William Knight (tenor) Marieke Franssen (flute) Eduard van Regteren Altena (violoncello)	
14:45-16:25	**Awards Ceremony**	Dom Church
16:25-16:45	**Sepideh Ensemble** Maryam Imanizadeh (vocals & *daff* / *tanboor*), Mehmet Polat (oud), Milad Ahmadi (vocals), Karvan Mustafa (*kamanche*), Arman Kavian (*tombak*), Ali Soltaninejad (*santur*), Pouria Jabbari (*daff*)	

University Museum (UMU),
Lange Nieuwstraat 106, Utrecht

17:00-18:30	**Opening Reception** Opening Reception with drinks and light refreshments at the Historic Botanical Garden *Oude Hortus* (Sponsored by Iran Heritage Foundation)	UMU | Oude Hortus

Thursday, August 6th – Schedule

Janskerkhof 2/3, Utrecht

8:30-10:30	**Panels 1-15**	Janskerkhof 2/3
1. Dutch Perspectives on Safavid Iran		Room 0.13
2. Architectural Technology Transfer on the Silk Road: Iranian Double-Shell Domes and the West		Room 0.17
3. Techno-politics in Iran across the Twentieth and Twenty-First centuries		Room 0.19
4. Entangled Histories: Ottoman-Iranian Encounters across Centuries		Room 0.21
5. The Emancipatory Aesthetics of Contemporary Iranian Theatre		Room 0.22
6. Tehranto: Beyond Tehran and Toronto - Iranians in Canada		Room 1.09
7. Histories of Circulation: People, Books, and Ideas between Iran and India (1500–1800)		Room 1.10
8. From the Alborz to the Caspian: Environmental Histories of Northern Iran		Room 1.11
9. Patronage and Governance in Medieval Azerbaijan		Room 1.15
10. Authorship, Desire, and Authority in Persian Literary Traditions		Room 1.16
11. Persian Sufi Poetics: Perspectives from within the Tradition		Room 1.17
12. Iranian Studies in Korea		Room 1.18
13. Economic and Social Policies and Institutions in Iran, 1920s–1970s		Room 2.17
14. Discourse, Narrative, and Global Frames of the 1979 Iranian Revolution		Room 2.18
15. Transregional intellectual and literary links within the Persian-speaking world in the 19th-20th centuries		Room 2.19
10:30-10:45	**Coffee Break**	Janskerkhof 2/3
10:45-12:45	**Panels 16-30**	Janskerkhof 2/3
16. Revisiting Reza Shah's Rule at the Centennial of the Pahlavi Monarchy		Room 0.13
17. Iranian Art and Material Culture in Switzerland: Toward a New Perspective		Room 0.17
18. Roundtable Festschrift in honour of Houchang Chehabi		Room 0.19
19. Panel: Navigating the Margins: A Transnational Perspective on Iranian Women's Music-Making		Room 0.21
20. Gendered Constraints and Aesthetic Expression in Iranian Film and Visual Production		Room 0.22
21. The Politics of Positionality: Critique and Self-Critique in the Study of the Iranian Diaspora in Western Europe, Turkey and Canada		Room 1.09
22. The Letter and the Spirit: Law, Legal Norms, and the Making of Modern Iran, 1919-1979		Room 1.10
23. Unpackaging Modernisation: the Manifestations of Reform in Iran, 1900-79		Room 1.11
24. New approaches and methods in the study of modern Iranian history		Room 1.15
25. Iran's Layered Temporality in European Women's Travel-Writing (1888-1936)		Room 1.16
26. Language, Power, and Resistance: The Kurdish Struggle Through Translation		Room 1.17
27. Critical Approaches to Sensory Histories of Iran		Room 1.18
28. Iranian Politics and International Relations (20th–21st Century)		Room 2.17
29. Resurrections of Kings and Heroes: Epic Narratives, Transmediality, and Cultural Memory Across Media		Room 2.18
30. Zoroastrianism: contacts and interchange between India and Iran		Room 2.19
12:45-13:45	**Lunch Break**	
13:45-15:45	**Panels 31-45**	Janskerkhof 2/3

31. . Iran Academia: An Evolving Model of University Beyond Borders	Room 0.13
32. Panel: Navigating the Margins (moved to slot 19)	Room 0.17
33. Creative, Tenacious Lion Women of Iran (SHIR ZANAN-E IRAN)	Room 0.19
34. Roundtable - Iranian Masculinities Across Time - Part I	Room 0.21
35. Mapping the Imaginary of the Iranian World in Spain: Space, Borders, and Ethnicities	Room 0.22
36. The Iranian diaspora: Intersections, Dialogues, and Perspectives from Spain	Room 1.09
37. Transfer of Knowledge in Indo-Persian Sources I	Room 1.10
38. The Transnational Fabric of the Iranian Revolution: Micro-Historical Perspectives	Room 1.11
39. Circulation of Knowledge in Persian between Anatolia and China	Room 1.15
40. The Many Faces of Kaveh: Power, Myth and Resistance Across Borders	Room 1.16
41. "Citizens of the World": Modern Kurdish Literature Between Different Languages, Genres and Countries	Room 1.17
42. Learning Across Borders: Activism, Family, and Knowledge in the Iranian Diaspora	Room 1.18
43. Zoroastrianism and Iranian Literary Traditions: Continuity, Transformation, and Memory	Room 2.17
44. Diversity and Modernity in Contemporary Shi`i Iranian Thought and Practice	Room 2.18
45. Bridging Scholarship and Devotion: The Twelver Shi'i Supplication (du ʿā) Corpus in its Persianate Context	Room 2.19

15:45-16:00	**Coffee Break**	Janskerkhof 2/3
16:00-18:00	**Panels 46-60**	Janskerkhof 2/3

46. Iranian Studies in a Time of War: Crisis, Continuity, and the Future of the Field.	Room 0.13
47. Sensuous Sheets: Decorated Papers in Premodern Manuscript Cultures	Room 0.17
48. Iranian Queer Imaginaries Across Media	Room 0.19
49. Roundtable - Iranian Masculinities Across Time - Part II	Room 0.21
50. Cultural Psychopathology: Negotiating with Power and the Unconscious Structures of Social Order in Iran	Room 0.22
51. Diasporic Revolutionary Imaginaries and Woman Life Freedom Uprising	Room 1.09
52. Transfer of Knowledge in Indo-Persian Sources II	Room 1.10
53. Persian literature of the early Ilkhanate: stories of rebellion and poems of decline	Room 1.11
54. Dimensions of the Iran-Iraq War and Its Extensions: Bottom-up Perspectives on Unintended Consequences of Strategic Decisions and Encounters	Room 1.15
55. Persian Manuscripts under the Microscope: Problems of Identification, Transmission, and Interpretation	Room 1.16
56. Idols, Lovers, and Manuscripts: Reassessing the Early Persian Romance Tradition	Room 1.17
57. Shahnameh Beyond Borders	Room 1.18
58. Connectivity and Mobility in the Premodern Iranian World	Room 2.17
59. Challenges in Studying Religions of Modern Iran	Room 2.18
60. Popular Shi ʿi Observances: Narrative, Ritual, and Identity in Early Modern and Contemporary Iran	Room 2.19

Leeuwenbergh, Servaasbolwerk 1a, Utrecht

18:30-19:30	**Keynote Session** **Christine van Ruymbeke** "Changes, challenges and opportunities. Persian literary studies in this second quarter of the 21st century." *Drinks are available at Leeuwenbergh to purchase*	Leeuwenbergh

Janskerkhof 2/3, Utrecht

8:30-10:30	**Panels 61-75**	Janskerkhof 2/3
61. Enduring Signs: Text, Image, and the Afterlives of the Ancient Iranian World		Room 0.13
62. Negotiating Modernity through Space: Reform, Gender, Perception, and Representation in Nineteenth-Century Qajar Iran		Room 0.17
63. Short Story as Material for Teaching Persian as a Foreign Language		Room 0.19
64. Iran in the Second World War		Room 0.21
65. Navigating the Persianate Cosmopolis: Pre-modern and Modern Ottoman Intellectuals in the Face of Persian Cultural and Scientific Heritage		Room 0.22
66. The Constitutional Revolution (1906–11) and Beyond – Spatial, Temporal, and Relational Dimensions		Room 1.09
67. Broadening histories of Iran in the long nineteenth century through the study of commodities		Room 1.10
68. Translating Identities: Iranian Jews Between Community, Nation, and Diaspora		Room 1.11
69. New Perspectives on Endangered Iranian Languages of Eastern Transcaucasia and Central Asia		Room 1.15
70. The Eloquent Body: Rewriting Love, Gender, and Eroticism in Indo-Persian Narratives		Room 1.16
71. Persian Literary Domination and Vernacular Resistance: Case Studies from Kurdish, Baluchi, Pashto and Shughni		Room 1.17
72. Speculative Iran: Between haunting and futurity		Room 1.18
73. Working Around the Sanctions in and Around Iran		Room 2.17
74. Reason, Revelation, and Revival: Esoteric Hermeneutics from Nāṣir i Khusraw to Rūmī and the Present		Room 2.18
75. Between Conformity and Resistance: Cultural and Institutional Performances of Power in Post--Revolutionary Iran		Room 2.19
10:30-10:45	**Coffee Break**	Janskerkhof 2/3
10:45-12:45	**Panels 76-90**	Janskerkhof 2/3
76. Revisiting Hedayat 1: His Drawings, and Art in his Fiction		Room 0.13
77. Concepts and Narratives in the Historiography of Iranian Art and Architecture		Room 0.17
78. Innovations and Challenges in Teaching Persian Language and Culture: Interdisciplinary Approaches in Persian Studies		Room 0.19
79. Social Histories of Technology and the Environment		Room 0.21
80. The Afterlife of Sadi Shirazi's Legacy in the Persianate World: Print Culture in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries		Room 0.22
81. Landscapes of Transition: Routes, Landscapes, and Cultural Interaction in the Zagros in the First Millennium CE		Room 1.09
82. The Many Worlds of Tārīkh-i Qum: Local Governance, Urban Growth, and Shi'i Identity in Tārīkh-i Qum		Room 1.10
83. Media, Modernity, and Public Life in Iran, in the Late nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries		Room 1.11
84. Tracking the Indo-Iranian Origin: Syntactical and Etymological Discussions		Room 1.15
85. Global Afterlives: Contemporary Translations of Persian Literature		Room 1.16
86. Negotiating Worlds: Adaptation and Interpretation in Indo-Persian Literary Thought		Room 1.17
87. War and Polyphony: Representing and Remembering the Iran-Iraq War in Contemporary Cultural Production		Room 1.18
88. Beyond Political Fragmentation: Diasporic Collective Memory and Reenactment of the Constitutional Past after Woman, Life, Freedom		

89. Rethinking Political Islam in Revolutionary and Post-revolutionary Iran: Apparatus of Control,		Room 2.17
90. Embodied Cosmologies: Devotion, Knowledge, and Esoteric Traditions in the Premodern Islamicate World		Room 2.18
		Room 2.19
12:45-13:45	**Lunch Break**	
13:45-15:45	**Panels 91-105**	Janskerkhof 2/3
91. Revisiting Hedayat 2: The Blind Owl - Interpretations and Translations		Room 0.13
92. Law, Space and Subjectivity: Institutional Regulation and the Reconfiguration of Urban Space in Tehran (1850s–1940s)		Room 0.17
93. Teaching Persian in a Changing World Order: Language Education, Cultural Understanding, and Strategic Role of Language		Room 0.19
94. Past and Present: Revisiting the 1979 Iranian Revolution through the Lens of Iran's Current Sociopolitical Dynamics		Room 0.21
95. Texts of Dominion, Acts of Dissent: Iranian Gender Politics from Andarz to Instagram Title		Room 0.22
96. The Legacy of the Sasanian Empire in Contemporary Iran Through the Perspectives of Language, Art, and Culture		Room 1.09
97. State, Society and Religion under Reza Shah		Room 1.10
98. The 1979 Revolution: Historical Contingencies, Unrealized Possibilities, and Imagined Futures		Room 1.11
99a. Conversation analytic studies of Persian talk-in-interaction: Making visible jointly accomplished practices		Room 1.15
99b. Disinformation and misinformation on social media in Iran		
100. Circuits of Persian Publishing: Materiality, Networks, and Canon Formation		Room 1.16
101. Philology I: Persian and the Critique of Philology		Room 1.17
102. Evolving Traditions: Creativity, Memory, and Musical Agency in the Global Iranian Soundscape		Room 1.18
103. Reimagining Freedom: Gender, Myth, and the Narrative Politics of the "Woman, Life, Freedom" Movement		Room 2.17
104. Beyond Sharia: The role of Sufism in Shaping Islam I		Room 2.18
105. Roundtable: Israel's June 2025 War on Iran: Reflections on Contested Publics and Media		Room 2.19
15:45-16:00	**Coffee Break**	Janskerkhof 2/3
16:00-18:00	**Panels 106-120**	Janskerkhof 2/3
106. Revisiting Hedayat 3: His Works in Cultural Context		Room 0.13
107. Calligraphy and the Collective Consciousness: Reimagining the Nastaʿlīq script as a Cultural Vector		Room 0.17
108. Studies in Early Modern Persian Literature		Room 0.19
109. Propaganda and Cultural Diplomacy in Pahlavi and Post-Revolutionary Iran		Room 0.21
110. Persianate Women in Unexpected Spaces: Sensing Presence and Power		Room 0.22
111. Translation and Multilingualism in the Jewish-Iranian World		Room 1.09
112. Persianate Banaras: An Untold Story of Early Modern Multilingualism		Room 1.10
113. New Approaches to the Persian Majmūʿa(s) and Jung(s) [book compilations]		Room 1.11
114. The Familiar Stranger. Encounters with the Iranian and non-Iranian 'Other' in Persian Literature		Room 1.15
115. Persian and German Literary Encounters		Room 1.16
116. Philology II: "World Philology" and the Adab Disciplines		Room 1.17
117. Thinking Farsi-zaban Geographies through Afghanistan: Knowledge Production, Archives, and Politics in Transnational Perspective		Room 1.18
118. Iranian Encounters: Americans with and in Iran, Iranians with America and in the Region		Room 2.17

119. Beyond Sharia: The Role of Sufism in Shaping Islam II		Room 2.18

Leeuwenbergh, Servaasbolwerk 1a, Utrecht

18:30-19:30	**Keynote Session** **Janet Afary** "On the 120th Anniversary of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution: Reflections from Diaspora" *Drinks are available at Leeuwenbergh to purchase*	Leeuwenbergh

Saturday, August 8th – Schedule

Janskerkhof 2/3, Utrecht

8:30-10:30	**Panels 121-132**	Janskerkhof 2/3
121. Iranian Engagement with Asia and Latin America in Late Qajar and Early Pahlavi Times		Room 0.13
122. On Consumption Across Persian & Arabic Sources		Room 0.17
123. Constraint and Creation: Contemporary Persian Literature and Iranian Cinema as Sites of Social Transformation		Room 0.19
124a. Modern Iranian Intellectual History in an Age of Global History		Room 0.21
124b. Hidden Voices, Veiled Desires: Gender and Eroticism in Early Modern Persian Poetry		
125. Echoes Across Borders: Persian Literature in Comparative Perspective		Room 0.22
126. The Role of Education in the Modernization Project of the Reza Shah Government		Room 1.09
127. New Perspectives on the Iranian Revolution		Room 1.10
128. Unions with the Supernatural in Popular Persian Literature and Devotional Drama		Room 1.17
129. Itinerant Voices: Musico-Poetic Performance On the Borders of Iran		Room 1.18
10:30-10:45	**Coffee Break**	Janskerkhof 2/3

Leeuwenbergh, Servaasbolwerk 1a, Utrecht

11:00-12:30	**Annual General Meeting**	Leeuwenbergh

Speakers and panels displayed in grey were originally scheduled but have since been cancelled

8:30-10:30 Janskerkhof 2/3

Room 0.13

1. Dutch Perspectives on Safavid Iran

by Rudi Matthee / University of Delaware / matthee@udel.edu

Since the Dutch were actively involved in Safavid Iran, they naturally wrote about the country and its people. The bulk of their reporting consists of commercial records, which were mostly factual, business-oriented, composed for practical purposes. Their other impressions are contained in (a limited number of) travelogues.

My paper will try to answer some of the questions raised by this material. One concerns the perspective on Iranian society evinced by the agents the Dutch East India Company, the grounds for their frequent complaints about Iranian obfuscation and duplicity.

After probing the reasons for the paucity of Dutch travel writing on early modern Iran—odd given the status of the United Provinces as the heart of the "Republic of Letters"—the second half of the paper will examine the two most prominent Dutch published travel writers, who also happen to be each other antipodes in terms of style and content: Jan Struys and Cornelis de Bruyn. The former was a semi-literate sail maker whose adventure story, Disastrous Travels through Russia and Persia (1676), is a fascinating mix of fact and fiction in a genre of dramatic stories with often catastrophic ending that was very popular in the second half of the seventeenth century. De Bruyn, by contrast, was a cultivated man, a classically trained painter in touch with the luminaries of his time who originally went to Iran to visit Persepolis and whose Travels via Muscovy to Persia and India (1711) is invaluable for its naturalist descriptions of the country's landscapes, with a focus on its flora and fauna.

Both made their own contribution to our knowledge of Safavid Iran, one by offering a narrative without artifice that includes surprising details taken from real life, including information about slavery in the Caucasus; the other by painting a fresh picture of Iranian society, with precise information on especially Isfahan, a unique set of visual images drawn with great precision, illustrating his narrative with countless neo-classicist engravings of Iran's monuments, cast in an often bucolic setting, yet faithful to the "original," indeed more life-like in their exactitude than any previous work on Iran.

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1. Social Sciences in and of Iran: Between Detachment and Presentness

Chair: Asef Bayat

This panel explores how Iran's social sciences and Iranian Studies worldwide have become disconnected from the presentness or contemporaneity of Iranian society, each in its own way. By presentness, we do not mean a mere focus on contemporary Iranian society detached from its past and future, but rather an understanding of the present as situated within a continuum that extends from the past toward the future—in other words, a temporal interpretation of space rather than a spatial interpretation of time.

This disconnection has led mainstream Iranian Studies toward a form of historicism that falls short of embedding its temporal analyses in the situated spatial realities of contemporary Iranian society. At the same time, the challenges and risks of conducting research in Iran and the limited access to the field have further hindered Iranian Studies' engagement with Iran's present. A similar, yet more complex, challenge has emerged within Iran's social sciences in the post-revolutionary period. The dominance of the discourses of Islamization and indigenization, and the role of the university in the broader state-building project after the revolution, will be discussed as key factors. Efforts to align the social sciences with ideological, developmentalist, or reformist state agendas have produced a

state-led reconfiguration of knowledge, privileging officially commissioned, data-driven, positivist, and policy-oriented research over critical and autonomous inquiry. These officially commissioned studies have rarely been accessible to the public, and their prevailing instrumentalist approach has offered little insight into the complex dynamics of actually existing society. This process has also contributed to the marketization of the social sciences, both in academic and policy-oriented research.
Critical social sciences, which have operated on the margins and in parallel to the official academia, have sought to challenge these dominant discourses. Yet they too, have come to be dominated by a detached textualism and abstract and rigid theorism— a tendency that has effectively expelled fieldwork and participant observation from the realm of critical social science. This panel explores the multiple factors and processes underlying these developments and seeks to establish a basis for reconnecting Iranian Studies worldwide and the social sciences in Iran through the lens of presentness—and the recognition of its absence.

Overcoming Detachment through Dialogue: The Legacies of the Journal Goftogu
by Kaveh Ehsani / DePaul University / kehsani@depaul.edu
During its three decades of publication (1993-2023), the independent quarterly journal Goftogu (Dialogue) augured a novel approach to social, cultural, and political analysis in and of Iran. Recognizing the highly polarized state of social inquiry in a society upended by the violence of revolution, war, and neoliberal postwar reconstruction, the aptly named "Dialogue" aimed at influencing public discourse and social analysis in Iran by shifting away from the prevailing ideological and overly abstract theoretical methodologies. The journal's editorial board consciously dedicated itself to a number of principles: To become and remain an independent and secular platform for critical analysis of a society and polity in throes of relentless turbulent change; to commission and publish substantive material based on rigorous and grounded fieldwork, original archive-based historiography; to invite and facilitate open and critical dialogue among different ideological perspectives -Islamist, leftist, liberal, nationalist, etc.; and to include the work of scholars based abroad and put them into conversation with scholars working in Iran. The journal's initial issues coincided with one of the first major urban social protests in postwar Iran in the immigrant working class satellite city of Islamshahr. The future tone of the journal was set after it published groundbreaking field studies of urban life there. In the following 96 issues, each dedicated to a specific theme, the journal published original research and analysis in many fields – urban studies, ethnic studies, field-based ethnographies, gender studies, social and political history, cultural studies, comparative politics aimed at directly engaging pressing present issues in Iran. This paper attempts to analyze journal's far reaching ideational and methodological influence on Iran's public culture of social/political inquiry, democratic dialogue, and publication for a general engaged public

The travels of Frankfurt School Theory in Iran Social Science
by Abbas Verij Kazemi / Institute for Social and Cultural Studies / javfalavi@gmail.com
This article offers a relational account of how the ideas of the Frankfurt School entered Iranian social sciences and the transformations that this journey engendered. I conceptualize the movement of theory as a socially mediated process in which translations, curricula, publishing networks, and institutional gatekeepers manipulate conceptual vocabularies and alter their critical value. A careful examination of Persian translations, textbook histories, and journal debates reveals that translators and intermediaries decisively shaped how critical theory was read and taught in Iran.
Two principal dynamics governed the School's presence in Iran. The first dynamic was pedagogical and editorial: translations and textbooks incorporated Frankfurt School categories into curricula while often privileging exposition and historical reconstruction over creative theorizing. This

tendency helped institutionalize a domesticated variant of critical theory that gained academic legitimacy while relinquishing part of its oppositional edge. The second dynamic was dialogic and political: Frankfurt-derived motifs circulated among networks of religious-modernist thinkers, heterodox Marxists, and reformist publics, producing hybrid vocabularies capable either of catalyzing dissent or of legitimizing institutional reform.
I demonstrate how the Frankfurt School contributed to the emergence of the Second Khordad reformist movement, and how, thereafter, it gradually receded into the academic sphere—taking form in curricula or intellectual prestige. I then trace how it travelled beyond Iran, influencing Iran's Persian-speaking neighbor Afghanistan and helping to shape a new left-leaning youth current there. The study concludes that travel is generative rather than merely transmissive: as concepts move they mutate, acquiring new forms, audiences, and functions. I propose an archival-network-contrapuntal method that foregrounds translators, intermediaries, and institutional constraints, and I argue that a sociology of ideas that attends to mobility, translation, and contingency offers a richer account of the plural and contested destinies of critical thought in Islamic societies.

Room 0.17

2. Architectural Technology Transfer on the Silk Road: Iranian Double-Shell Domes and the West

Chair: Hadi Safaeipour

This panel presents the challenging process and results of a nine-year international collaboration between Prof. Hadi Safaeipour and Dr. Lorenzo Vigotti on the circulation of architectural knowledge across Eurasia, with a focus on Iranian double-shell domes and their potential influence on European dome construction. Supported by a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Global Fellowship (2023–26), the project centers on a comprehensive study of the 14th-century Mausoleum of Oljaytu in Soltaniyeh—the largest brick dome in Iran and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The discussion revisits Piero Sanpaolesi's hypothesis that technical solutions observed in Iranian medieval domes, such as the Mausoleum of Oljaytu, may have informed European traditions of dome construction, including Brunelleschi's dome in Florence. Bringing together archival research, scientific field surveys, and structural analysis, the panel explores both the historical and technical plausibility of this idea.
Dr. Lorenzo Vigotti situates Sanpaolesi's theory within the broader historical and transregional context of Soltaniyeh, reconstructing its role as a cosmopolitan hub along the Silk Road and the Mongol Empire's summer capital, where Persian, Mongol, and Christian communities interacted and enabled knowledge transfer to Europe. Farzad Zerehdaran and Manizheh Khademi examine the Mausoleum of Oljaytu from archival and technical perspectives. Zerehdaran traces Sanpaolesi's 1970s restoration campaigns and the dispersal of technical records, while Khademi presents findings from modern surveys—including photogrammetry, laser scanning, ground-penetrating radar, and excavation—that refine the prevailing understanding of the dome's construction. Finally, Safaeipour situates the Soltaniyeh dome within the broader Iranian dome-building tradition, showing the double-shell concept as the culmination of centuries of experimentation and craftsmanship.
Together, the panel highlights the mausoleum as a site of architectural innovation and intercultural exchange, significant for both Iranian history and the history of global architecture.

Revisiting the Mausoleum of Oljaytu's Structural System within the Iranian Dome-Making Tradition
by Hadi Safaeipour / https://archurb.sbu.ac.ir/~h_safaeipur / safaeipourhadi@gmail.com
Between the Seljuk and Ilkhanid periods (10th–14th centuries), the Iranian plateau developed a rich and distinctive tradition of dome construction that remains underappreciated in global architectural history. Early experiments evolved into monumental structures built primarily of fired brick arranged in geometric patterns, drawing on Parthian and Sasanian precedents. Within this tradition, the double-shell dome emerged as a uniquely Persian achievement, uniting structural ingenuity with artistic vision. Erected without centering, these domes display a sophisticated mastery of materials

and geometry, underscoring Iran's role in medieval technological exchange.
The Mausoleum of Oljaytu represents the pinnacle of this tradition and remains one of the world's largest brick domes. Spanning such a vast space in brick required advanced structural understanding and innovative design. Its distinctive form, not easily aligned with earlier Iranian models, reflects the culmination of centuries of expertise and stands as a singular example of medieval double-shell construction on an unprecedented scale.
Drawing on archival records and modern scientific surveys, this paper offers a more precise structural reading of the monument, updating and correcting the knowledge of the 1970s restorers. It presents the mausoleum as a masterpiece of medieval engineering and situates it within the broader Iranian dome-making lineage, underscoring its exceptional place in architectural history.

From Soltaniyeh to Florence: Historical Contexts for the Transmission of Dome-Building Knowledge
by Lorenzo Vigotti / Architectural historian / lorenzo.vigotti@columbia.edu
Piero Sanpaolesi, a pioneering figure in architectural conservation, emphasized historical construction methods and material authenticity, advocating an approach rooted in field observation, archival study, and comparative analysis. His work raised questions about possible cross-cultural transfers of architectural knowledge.
This paper asks whether historical conditions allowed for such knowledge transfer between Iran and Europe. It examines the plausibility of influence and highlights Soltaniyeh's significance as a hub of innovation, interaction, and exchange. Soltaniyeh's strategic position on the Silk Road and its role as the Mongol summer capital placed it at the center of commercial, diplomatic, and cultural networks linking East and West. The city hosted a cosmopolitan society where Persian, Mongol, and Christian communities—including merchants, clergy, and diplomats—interacted, facilitating the exchange of goods, knowledge, and technical expertise. Archival records and travel accounts indicate that European centers such as Florence and the Vatican were informed about Soltaniyeh's political, economic, and material culture. While direct evidence of architectural transfer is limited, the city's dense web of trade routes, skilled artisans, and scholarly contacts suggest multiple plausible channels for transmitting complex construction techniques, including those used in double-shell domes.

The Mausoleum of Oljaytu through the Lens of Archival Resources
by Farzad Zerehdaran / Architectural historian / farzad.zerehdaran@gmail.com
In the 1960s, growing attention to Iran's historic monuments led to the initiation of a restoration project at the Mausoleum of Oljaytu. Prof. Sanpaolesi was appointed director of the newly established Institute for the Restoration of Historic Monuments at Iran's National University (now Shahid Beheshti University) and brought together Iranian and Italian specialists to document, assess, and restore the structure. Between 1969 and 1979, the decade-long campaign generated extensive documentation—photographs, architectural and technical drawings, reports, correspondence, and analytical studies—providing invaluable insight into the first generation of modern restoration of a monument in Iran.
This research investigates repositories in Iran and Italy—including the Documentation Center at SBU, the Sanpaolesi Archive at the University of Florence, the National Library and Archives of Iran, the Parliamentary Library and Archive, the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and Tourism, and the Institute of Archaeology—analyzing materials from more than twenty collections. By reconstructing the mausoleum's archival history, the study sheds new light on its original construction methods, the interventions of the 1970s, and the role of Iranian and Italian experts. Beyond clarifying technical features, it also reveals how international relations shaped strategies, decisions, and execution of the project.

The Mausoleum of Oljaytu through the Lens of Scientific Surveys

by Manizheh Khademi / Graduate Student, SBU / khademi.manizheh@gmail.com

Sanpaolesi's 1970s surveys of the Mausoleum of Oljaytu—conducted with the limited tools of the time—introduced substantial errors. For decades, his drawings served as the primary reference for scholars, while Brunelleschi's dome in Florence has been repeatedly studied with advanced methods. The absence of comparable data left serious gaps in accuracy and reliability, compounded by unclear survey methodologies and documentation practices.

To address these limitations, new scientific investigations were undertaken: photogrammetry and laser scanning to capture precise geometry, endoscopy to study rib and shell construction, ground-penetrating radar to identify concealed structural components, and excavations to analyze foundations. A detailed virtual tour model was also developed for scholarly use.

This paper presents the results of these integrated surveys. It corrects errors in Sanpaolesi's drawings, reconstructs a structural model of the mausoleum, and demonstrates how modern tools can renew and refine understanding of one of the world's most remarkable domes.

Room 0.19

3. Techno-politics in Iran across the Twentieth and Twenty-First centuries

Chair: Farzin Vejdani, Gunha Kim | Discussant: Mikiya Koyagi

This panel explores how scientific and technological projects have both shaped and been shaped by political programs in modern and contemporary Iran, including strategies of governance, nation-building, and resource extraction. Crossing disciplinary boundaries, the papers approach this question from diverse vantage points, ranging from medical and cartographic sciences to environmental infrastructures and digital surveillance.

The first paper opens by analyzing the emergence of a "suicide science" during the Pahlavi period, showing how scientific discourses depoliticized voluntary death in recognition of the political potency of martyrdom. It highlights the disciplinary violence embedded in the life sciences, which sought to naturalize or pathologize individual acts of suicide in the service of the state governance.

The second paper examines the paradoxical geography of control in the Islamic Republic's borderlands. Through the cases of sheep smuggling and cryptocurrency mining, it shows how state-linked networks treat pastures, water, and electricity as inexhaustible resources for extraction, while border crossers are met with extreme violence. These cases reveal how authoritarian technopolitics operate through both overregulation of life and permissive neglect of environments.

The third paper turns to late-Qajar and early Pahlavi Iran, tracing how small cartographic and measuring instruments curated by engineer Muhandis Baghaeeri shaped nationalist imaginations through their everyday circulation. It argues that quotidien scientific expertise played as much as big role in Iranian nationalism as large infrastructures did.

Finally, the fourth paper interrogates the deployment of AI-based surveillance technologies to enforce hijab laws. It demonstrates how digital technopolitics intensify authoritarian governance, while simultaenously generating new repertoires of subversion in the wake of the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement.

Taken together, the panel highlights how technologies of measurement, extraction, surveillance, and medicalization constitute not only instruments of state control and violence but also sites and practices of everyday politics in Iran.

Politics of Suicide Science in Pahlavi Iran

by Gunha kim / PhD Candidate in the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations, University of Toronto / gunha.kim@mail.utoronto.ca

This paper tracks the evolution of scientific discussions on suicide in Iran during the Pahlavi Dynasty. Based on archival studies of science journals aligned with the state, such as Police Journal, Legal Medicine, Psychiatry, and Psychology, this paper argues that scientific studies on suicide have constantly aimed at depoliticizing suicide, reflecting an awareness of the political potential of voluntary death—martyrdom—in Iran. It resulted in a form of suicide science distinct from the Western counterparts yet developed in dialogue with them; its discursive techniques transformed from thought experiment to moral censure, then to pathologization of suicide as a social epidemic, accompanied by a methodological transition from philosophical and psychological to more sociological and quantitative. This paper finds the suicide of a dramatist, Reza Kamal (1898-1937), and his "suicide pact" in 1937 and the suicide of a wrestling champion and National Front activist, Gholamreza Takhti (1930-1968) as two critical moments motivating these shifts.
This study aims to contribute to the body of research that has examined the integral role of the life sciences in shaping nationalism and building the modern state in Iran, focusing on the disciplinary nature and violence embedded in nationalist science projects. By engaging with suicide science in particular, it observes the characterization of a necropolitical context in which voluntary death was politicized as a key mode of resistance aimed at challenging and de-naturalizing state-framed deaths during the 1978-79 Revolution.

Digital Panopticon and Everyday Resistance : The Hijab Politics of Iranian Women

by Gi Yeon Koo / Seoul National University Asia Center / kikiki9@snu.ac.kr

This study provides an anthropological analysis of the Iranian government's biopolitical governance through digital surveillance technologies and women's everyday resistance practices against such control. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork and digital media analysis, this research examines how authoritarian states deploy technological apparatus to regulate gendered bodies and behaviors. Since the 2010s, the Iranian government has systematically introduced Chinese-manufactured AI surveillance cameras and facial recognition systems across public spaces, transportation networks, and urban centers to automate the regulation of women's dress code compliance. This "algorithmic governmentality" represents a new technology of power that extends beyond Foucault's disciplinary surveillance society, replacing physical enforcement with ubiquitous digital monitoring to implement what the state terms "contactless automated law enforcement." The integration of artificial intelligence with religious law enforcement creates unprecedented forms of social control that penetrate previously private spheres of daily life.
However, following the 2022 "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement, Iranian women have increasingly practiced everyday politics by removing their hijabs in public streets, transforming acts of dress into political statements. This exemplifies an extension of James C. Scott's concept of "everyday resistance" into the digital age, demonstrating how women tactically exploit surveillance blind spots, technological limitations, and temporal gaps in monitoring systems. The phenomenon of "selective compliance"—wearing hijabs only inside vehicles where cameras are most prevalent—represents a particularly novel form of resistance strategy under the digital panopticon. Through examining the complex dynamics between advanced surveillance technology, gender discipline, and women's agency, this research illuminates the technopolitics of contemporary authoritarian governance and emerging patterns of civil society resistance in the digital age.

"We do have engineers": Building the state and technological trust through small technologies in the early-20th century Iran

by Ata Heshmati / University of Toronto / ata.heshmati@mail.utoronto.ca

This paper explores the interconnected story of a set of small geographical and cartographical objects such as a geographical globe; a map of Iran; an atlas of the world, and many professional

cartographic and surveying instruments acquired, curated, and exhibited multiple times by the Persian engineer, Muhandis Abd al-Razzaq Baghayiri (1869-1953). According to his autobiography, personal survey notes, publications, correspondence, and other official documents that I present in this paper, Baghayiri played a defining role in the transition of modern Persian geographical knowledge from descriptive and literary forms to various methodologies of quantification and visualization. Iranians' understanding of their nation, its locality on the planet earth, and its temporality on the anthropo-geological history of human race were partially shaped through the cartographical and geographical efforts of Persian engineers such as Baghayiri. In a crumbling world that witnessed the Constitutional Revolution in 1906, the 1907 Anglo-Russian convention, occupation of the country during WWI, although he became a trustworthy broker of knowledge between the public and the state by surveying private and crown properties, partaking in multi-national frontier commissions, and holding engineering exhibitions and popularization events; he failed to secure a job position or win large surveying projects. This paper argues that the nationalist milieu of the early-20th century materialized beyond the big infrastructures such as telegraph, roads, railways, and monuments; it was embodied also within certain material models and small artifacts whose creator and curator, Mohandis Baghayeri, worked consistently to maintain their trustworthiness, precision, and accuracy. Baghayeri also represents a particular challenge for Persian knowledge-makers and scientists whose direct involvements in the geopolitical matters made them prone to accusations of espionage and treason. He used certain sciences and technologies of self-making, such as crafting, cartography, meteorology, 'ilm al-Ansab (science of pedigree), and 'ilm al-Rijal (science of narrators), to recreate a hybrid narrative of Iran's distinct climate, diverse population, and complex genealogy.

Borders of Plunder: Environmental Miscontrol and Infrastructural Violence in Iran

by Rouzbeh Akhbari / University of Toronto / rouzbeh.akhbari@mail.utoronto.ca

This paper interrogates the environmental and geographical imagination of the Iranian state through an analysis of maritime smuggling and extractive economies. Drawing on fieldwork in ports, barns, and border checkpoints along the International North-South Transit Corridor, it examines how Iran's territorial resources (pasture, water, and electricity) are conceived as limitless and thus available for unrestrained exploitation.

The case of sheep smuggling is emblematic. Millions of animals are imported at a young age from Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Armenia, fattened on Iran's national parks and water-stressed rangelands, and then exported across the Persian Gulf. What appears as a simple livestock trade is in fact an indirect transfer of Iranian water and pasture to regional economies. The paradox lies in the coexistence of extreme violence against human trespassers and the permissive circulation of millions of livestock under the protection of state-connected networks. This selective governance reflects a state logic that criminalizes precarious life while facilitating corridors of informal accumulation.

The same extractive imagination extends into the digital and financial domain. Since the late 2010s, cryptocurrency mining has proliferated across the country, consuming vast amounts of electricity and water. While ordinary Iranians endure rolling blackouts and water scarcity, existing infrastructures are commandeered to generate speculative value for transnational circulation. Just as sheep smuggling indirectly exports water, crypto mining exports energy, embedding fragile ecosystems into global circuits of finance.

Placing these domains side by side, the paper advances the concept of environmental miscontrol: a form of technopolitics where authoritarian states deploy sovereign violence to police bodies and borders while simultaneously enabling ecological plunder. These practices reveal not failed governance but a deliberate misdistribution of control, where surveillance is concentrated on the poor and precarious while shadow industries extract with impunity.

Room 0.21

4. Entangled Histories: Ottoman-Iranian Encounters across Centuries

Chair: Rudi Matthee, Ayşe Baltacıoğllu-Brammer

This panel reconsiders the multifaceted interactions between the Ottoman and Iranian worlds across the early modern and modern periods, moving beyond the conventional focus on imperial rivalry and sectarian division. While conflict and sectarian rhetoric were recurring features of their relationship, Ottoman-Iranian encounters also generated rich zones of cooperation, negotiation, and exchange that reshaped both polities. Drawing on new research in diplomacy, politics, society, art, and gender, the papers assembled here examine these encounters in their variety, tracing the shifting modalities of power, legitimacy, and sociocultural transformation across four centuries. Together, they highlight the ways in which the Ottoman and Iranian spheres were entangled, mutually constitutive, and embedded in larger Eurasian and global processes.

The first paper explores late sixteenth-century "pseudo-Shah Ismail" movements across Anatolia and Iran, showing how these claimants exposed crises of legitimacy, sectarian belonging, and frontier governance. The second paper examines seventeenth-century shifts in Ottoman-Safavid gift exchange, where rare royal artifacts gave way to reciprocal trade in bulk goods, reflecting a new diplomatic language shaped by global markets. The third considers the eighteenth century, when Ottoman policy paradoxically favored the Shiʿi Safavids over their Sunni successors, underscoring how questions of legitimacy could outweigh sectarian alignment. The final paper turns to the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century to compare women's roles in the Ottoman and Iranian constitutional revolutions, highlighting their activism and aspirations as well as their subsequent marginalization.

By foregrounding issues of legitimacy, diplomacy, commerce, art, and gender, the panel situates Ottoman-Iranian relations within broader debates on empire, sectarianism, and global connectivity. It challenges long-standing historiographical tendencies to read these interactions narrowly through conflict, instead revealing how both antagonism and collaboration shaped the political, economic, and social landscapes of the region. By juxtaposing case studies from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries, the panel underscores the need to rethink Ottoman-Iranian relations as dynamic, multidimensional, and deeply interwoven with wider processes of regional and global transformation.

"I Am Shah Ismail!": The Pseudo-Shah Ismail Incidents of the Late Sixteenth Century and the Entangled Histories of Anatolia and Iran

by Ayse Baltacioglu-Brammer / New York University / abb12@nyu.edu

In this paper I examine the pseudo-Shah Ismail incidents, a series of events that unfolded between 1578 and 1581 in both Anatolia and Iran, where multiple individuals emerged claiming to be Shah Ismail I (d. 1524) or Shah Ismail II (d. 1577). These movements were not merely isolated cases of false claimants but were deeply intertwined with the broader political, religious, and socio-economic transformations of the period. By analyzing archival and narrative sources from the Ottoman and Safavid sides, this study situates the pseudo-Shah Ismail incidents within the larger context of imperial rivalry between the two courts, the leadership crises within the Safavid state, and the shifting dynamics between political authority and popular religious movements in both empires. Furthermore, the study explores how these movements reflected growing tensions between the Safavid dynasty and the Qizilbash communities, particularly in Ottoman territories, as well as the broader implications of these crises for state control, sectarian politics, and frontier governance. I argue that these incidents were not solely expressions of localized unrest but were indicative of a wider crisis of political legitimacy, sectarian belonging, and imperial governance in the late sixteenth century in both realms. By re-examining these incidents beyond rigid imperial boundaries, I aim to

offer a perspective on transregional and transimperial interactions and the entangled histories of Ottoman and Safavid religio-political spheres.

Symmetrical Diplomacy: New Gifts between Ottoman-Safavid Courts in a Trade-Oriented Global World

by Sinem Arcak Casale / Kunsthistorisches Institut Max Planck Institut in Florenz / sinem004@gmail.com

During the mid seventeenth century, a dramatic change took place in the gift-giving practices between the Ottoman Sultans and the Safavid Shahs. In the sixteenth century, diplomatic gift exchange between these two courts was characterized by three essential features. First, the exchange was asymmetrical, in the sense that for long periods gifts were sent only from the Safavid court to Istanbul without comparable offerings being sent in return. Second, Safavid gifts mostly originated in Iran, involving materials or objects naturally found or crafted there. Third, these gifts involved rare and carefully curated objects that carried royal associations and projected cultural capital and wealth, from lavishly illustrated manuscripts to silk carpets and jewels. But following a period of turbulence in the early seventeenth century, as Shah ʿAbbās asserted a new form of control over profits on the trade of Iranian silk, the two courts eventually established an entirely new modality of exchange. Now, gifts were exchanged in a reciprocal manner, with the Ottomans giving as well as receiving. Exchange was also recalibrated around commercially valued goods, such as raw silk and bulk, leaving behind rare and royal objects. And increasingly, these were unexceptional Indian textiles that were remarkable not for their quality but for their huge numbers. As such, this new mode of gifting points to a new language of diplomacy that was reflective of a new kind of orientation to politics in a globalizing world of market relations, based on new triangulations of commodification and commerce.

Ottoman Eastern Policy within Sectarian Dynamics in the Early Modern Era

by Habib Saçmalı / Marmara University / habibsacmali@gmail.com

It is widely accepted among modern historians that Ottoman-Safavid relations were largely hostile, rooted primarily in sectarian differences. However, following the fall of the Shiʿi Safavids in 1722, the Sunni regimes of the Afghans and Nadir Shah replacing the Safavids did not bring about the expected sectarian rapprochement with the Ottomans. On the contrary, long periods of peace with the Safavids were followed by major wars in the post-1722 period between the Ottomans and their new co-confessional neighbors. Why did the replacement of the Safavids with Sunni dynasties fail to bring Pax-Sunnica to the heartlands of the Muslim world? This paper centers on this contradiction and argues that from at least the late 1630s onwards, the protection of the Safavid state became a strategic priority in Ottoman eastern policy. Drawing on contemporary Ottoman, Persian, and European sources, it analyzes the Ottomans' pro-Safavid and anti-Afghan and anti-Nadir stance within the religious and political dynamics of the early modern period. The Shiʿi Safavids' ineligibility to rule as legitimate Sunni leaders in the eyes of the Ottoman Sunni subjects rendered the Safavid dynasty a safe neighbor who could not challenge the sultan's religio-political legitimacy. In contrast, the Sunni dynasties of Asia challenged that very legitimacy precisely because they shared the same religious identity as the Ottomans. For this reason, Istanbul viewed the Safavids as a buffer protecting both its lands and the sultan's legitimacy, and actively supported them against the Sunni contenders.

Constituting Change: Women in the Ottoman and Iranian Constitutional Revolutions

by Serpil Atamaz / California State University Sacramento / atamaztopcu@csus.edu

The twentieth century began with revolutions worldwide, two of which occurred in the Islamic world. First Qajar Iran, then Ottoman Turkey witnessed revolutionary movements, resulting in the

establishment of constitutional regimes in both countries. In both revolutions, women from different ethnic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds were at the forefront. Yet, they were sidelined quickly, first by their male counterparts once the revolution succeeded and later by historians who consistently overlooked or dismissed women's roles in these revolutions. In recent decades, scholars such as Bayat, Afary, Paidar, Ettehadieh, Sanasarian, Kurnaz, Çakır, and Demirdirek have brought to light some of the writings and activities of female revolutionaries in Qajar Iran and Ottoman Turkey but have studied them only within the confines of their own national contexts. This paper discusses women's involvement in the Iranian Revolution of 1906-1911 and the Ottoman Revolution of 1908 from a comparative and transnational perspective, exploring the similarities and differences between women's goals, strategies, and discourse. Based mostly on primary sources, such as women's periodicals, daily newspapers, and biographies, it demonstrates how ordinary women's activism contributed to the construction of a new political regime and a new social order in two Muslim empires transforming into "modern" nation-states at the turn of the twentieth century. In doing so, this paper not only sheds new light on the role of women in Turkish and Iranian history as agents of political and social change but also advances our understanding of the links between the constitutional revolutions in Turkey and Iran.

Room 0.22

5. The Emancipatory Aesthetics of Contemporary Iranian Theatre

Chair: Saeed Talajooy

The cultural space created by Iranian theatre has continued to be a bastion of emancipatory experimentation in which innovative approaches to linguistic, dramatic and literary expression join the defamiliarizing force of creative staging by means of light, sound, dance, silence, music, stylised acting, masks, multi-role casting or unpredictable action to promote new ways of seeing, hearing and understanding the world. This panel engages with several contemporary trends in this emancipatory space to demonstrate the ways Iranian plays staged inside and outside Iran between 2009 and 2025 have contributed to the rise of ever more cosmopolitan senses of selfhood and more fluid understandings of the binaries of victim and victimiser, personal and political, truth and untruth, and self and other.

The first paper offers a diachronic overview of some of the key themes and techniques discussed in the panel by reviewing the use of complementary, contradictory or metatheatrical parallel narratives since the 1960s and then analysing two contemporary plays in which parallel narratives are used to reflect the fluidity of history, our idea of truth, and our memory and identity. The second paper focuses on the use of linguistic hybridity to reflect the challenges of renegotiating our ideas of self and other in diasporic conditions. The third paper also engages with the diasporas' performances of the self and the way plays may transcend the limits of language and change our perceptions of the past and present by their display of 'the worldliness of Iranian theatrical humanism'. The final paper, then traces the transformation of the aesthetic qualities of Iranian theatre after the Green Movement from text-based expressions to collective creativity in plays that change the ways we see, hear and understand the world around us by recalibrating attention economies and regulating what may be seen and heard.

The Emancipatory Aesthetics of Parallel Narratives on Page and Stage

by Saeed Talajooy / University of St Andrews / st83@st-andrews.ac.uk

This paper examines the ways presentational, confessional or testimonial parallel narratives or monologues have been employed in Iranian drama to reflect the complementary, contradictory or metatheatrical narratives of events at personal, interpersonal and sociopolitical levels. While at personal levels such narratives reveal our conflicting or reinforcing narratives of selfhood as they determine our thoughts, actions and reactions, at interpersonal levels they compete to present

alternative versions of truth about events and relations, and at sociopolitical and historical levels, they reflect the rivalries and alliances of dominant and subsidiary discourses of collective identity as they attempt to turn the individuals into subjects of ideologies and carve a people's path to an imagined future by presenting themselves as bearers of truth.
The paper begins with a diachronic overview of how Naʿlbandian, Khalaj and Beyzaie used parallel narratives to reflect the relativity of truth, the fluidity of human identity, the conflicts of heroes and their shadows, and the layered and perspectival nature of memory and historical reporting. It, then, focuses on two recent reformulations of this emancipatory trend which remain personal in their focus but reflect the way totalitarian discourses of being and belonging overwhelm our lives by highlighting the ways characters reconstruct their memories or remain entrapped in their personal obsessions. The first play examined in the paper is Amir Reza Koohestani's Shenidan (Hearing, 2015) which focuses on the reports of an event when it happened and years later when the people involved are much older and one of them is dead. The second play will be Ali Asghar Dasthi's Nāmbordeh (The Above-Named Person, 2018), a metatheatrical play on the experience of an Iranian director whose failure during a trip to Saint Petersburg coincides with the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Staging the Forbidden: Theatre as an Emancipatory Space for Dance, Women's Voice, and Popular Music in Post Revolutionary Iran

by Parmis Mozafari / University of St Andrews / pm215@st-andrews.ac.uk

This paper argues that although after the 1979 Revolution, dance, female solo singing, and popular music were subject to sweeping bans, their strategic relocation to the theatrical sphere made the stage a key site of aesthetic negotiation and cultural emancipation. The paper first provides analyses the various approaches that facilitated the reemergence of music and dance under alternative names and conditions. For instance, it shows how dance was first reintroduced in public performances as harakāt e mowzun ("rhythmic movements"), a restricted but legally permissible form framed as theatrical expression rather than dance; how traditional popular music found renewed legitimacy almost exclusively in plays; or how female solo singing resurfaced in theatrical musicals, where singers were positioned as actresses rather than vocalists. It, then, categorises the types of productions that evolved since the 1990s to show how music and dance evolved from being occasional tools of stylised expression to primary forms of expression in several major theatrical trends: (1) indigenous-style plays with music and dance as nostalgic or satirical forms for questioning the present; (2) grand musical adaptations of Iranian legends and Sufi narratives; (3) grand musical adaptations of Western novels and plays; (4) puppet operettas on Iranian and non-Iranian narratives; and (5) plays on the conditions of the marginalised people and narratives with nostalgic use of pop music highlighting the cosmopolitan and multi-layered nature of Iranian identities. In the final section, the paper analyses three recent productions that create emancipatory visions by protecting, absorbing and reshaping music and dance to reintroduce new ways seeing and understanding. The paper proposes theatre as a site of cosmopolitan visions where embodied movement, gendered voice, and popular sound reconfigure understandings of agency, visibility, and cultural resistance.

From Text to Process: The Politics of Dramaturgy in Contemporary Iranian Theatre (2009–2024)

by Amin Azimi / Ph.D. candidate in Drama, Theatre & Performance Studies at the University of Toronto / amin.azimi@mail.utoronto.ca

This paper examines the period from the Green Movement (2009) to the "Woman, Life, Freedom" revolutionary uprising (2022) as an accelerated phase of aesthetic change in Iranian theatre. It asks how formal choices—the design of attention, the timing of appearance, and the ratios of seeing/hearing—have operated as instruments of political practice under constraint. Building on

Rancière's politics of aesthetics and Peter Eckersall's account of dramaturgy as a revelatory practice, I theorize these shifts as dissensus dramaturgy: formal decisions that redistribute the sensible by reconfiguring visibility, address, and spectatorship within Iran's performance ecology.
Methodologically, the paper combines performance analysis with dramaturgical documents to track mechanisms that organize experience and attention. Three chronologically ordered performance/text case studies (2010–2024) structure the argument: Mohammad Yaghoubi's Writing in the Dark (2010), which replaces direct dialogue with marked pauses and ellipses to render prohibition visible and convert minimalist economy into a staging logic; Nassim Soleimanpour's White Rabbit, Red Rabbit (2011), whose sealed-envelope protocol and unrehearsed cold reading privilege the event over the precomposed text and route meaning through procedure; and Asghar Dashti's This Theatrical Rehearsal Will Not Be Performed (2024), which suspends performance and recasts rehearsal as performance in underground settings that dissolve stage/audience boundaries and elevate presence as the organizing language of encounter.
Findings indicate a displacement from text-based representation to presence/body/ process, achieved not by manifestos but by regulating what may be seen and heard and by recalibrating attention economies. The paper offers a compact vocabulary for reading the political force of dramaturgical decisions in restriction-ridden contexts and critiques reductive content-based accounts of Iranian theatre.
Keywords: Contemporary Iranian theatre; dissensus dramaturgy; politics of aesthetics; non-performance; Rancière.
References: Rancière 2004; Eckersall 2024.

All Languages are one: Linguistic Hybridity, Identity, and Culture in Three Iranian Plays
by Naghmeh Samini / University of Washington / naghmehsamini@yahoo.com
As a shaping carrier of culture, language plays a key role in identity formation. While our use of language reflects the culture(s) in which we have evolved, the culture itself finds its coherent presence when it intersects with our identities to shape our use of language. These multisided functions are best manifested in drama as the only literary genre whose essence is bound to dialogue, which, in turn, makes analyzing plays that foreground language, culture, and identity particularly useful for revealing the conflicts of individuals' identities with the world around them. This presentation examines the functions of language in three contemporary plays that share a common strategy: the deployment of hybrid language. Such a language may appear outwardly as Persian or English, yet through dramatic techniques it bears the weight of both—or even multiple—languages simultaneously. The first play, English (2023) by Sanaz Toossi, reflects the process of language learning in which characters speak both Persian and English in English, with varying levels of proficiency, highlighting cultural and identity challenges in acquiring a new language. The second, The Forth Wall (2012) by Amir Reza Koohestani, assigns this hybrid function to Persian, weaving history, identity, and language together. The third, Child (2019), written by me, extends hybridity further to encompass Persian, Arabic, Kurdish, and English, producing an "umbrella language." In all these plays, language emerges as a tool of power in a migratory world, exposing the cultural and identity struggles of migrants navigating an unfamiliar linguistic landscape. The presentation addresses the intersection of language, identity, and culture in drama, emphasizes the role of contemporary Iranian plays as mirrors of cultural contradictions and individual identities, and compares these three plays to analyze the reasons for their use of a hybrid language in their attempts to reflect the challenges of immigration.

Room 1.09

6. Tehranto: Beyond Tehran and Toronto - Iranians in Canada
Chair: Amin Moghadam, Nima Naghibi

This panel is organized around the conceptual idea of "Tehranto" as a lens to explore the experiences of diasporic Iranians in Toronto and across Canada. The four papers each offer distinct yet interconnected perspectives on diasporic Iranian identity and belonging. In the first paper, "Healing in fragments: 1.5-generation Iranians' well-being trajectories in diaspora," the author explores the connections between belonging and well-being, particularly among the 1.5 generation in Toronto. The second paper, "Diaspora politics in Tehranto: an urban analysis of Woman, Life, Freedom movement" focuses on the articulation of diaspora politics in urban public spaces in Tehranto with a focus on the period between September to March 2022. The expression of diverse political positions in various public spaces in the city created possibilities for democratic engagement and political expression in the diaspora. The third paper, "Bala Shahr Ya Paeen Shahr? (Uptown or Downtown?): Stories of Iranian Settlement in Tehranto," explores the diverse social and cultural dynamics of diasporic Iranians by examining the ways in which the stories of diasporic Iranians and Iranian businesses have shaped distinct physical spaces and individual experiences in the city. The fourth paper, "From Kharej to Ghorbat: Migration Dreams and Diasporic Experiences of Iranians in Canada," explores the productive tensions that emerge, for the diasporic subject, between idealized and exoticized pre-migration perceptions of foreign lands (or Kharej) and a post-migration concept of "estranged lands" (or Ghorbat), highlighting both a sense of loss and longing, but also a redefinition of belonging. Together, these papers offer critical insights into the varied forms of belonging, identity negotiation, and place-making practices among Iranians in Toronto —anchored by, and reflective of, the plural meanings of "Tehranto."

Bala shahr ya Paeen shahr? (Uptown or Downtown?): Stories of Iranian Settlement in Tehranto
by Amin and Nima Moghadam and Naghibi / Toronto Metropolitan University / nnaghibi@torontomu.ca
Toronto is a city profoundly shaped by its diversity. While early immigrants from the 19th century to the post WWII period settled in the downtown core, the post-war transformation of the city contributed to the suburbanization of ethnic neighbourhoods. While Toronto's diversity is frequently celebrated, the city is also marked by stark socio-cultural polarizations across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Among both immigrant and non-immigrant populations, a dominant discourse often starkly juxtaposes the cultural and social vibrancy of the downtown core with what is perceived as a more staid suburban experience. These contradictory representations, familiar to most urban centres, reflect the differing social and cultural dynamics of their inhabitants. Our focus in this paper is on how the tension between bala shahr and paeen shahr in Toronto becomes entangled with similar dynamics perceived and experienced in the Iranian context, and how this interplay contributes to shaping the urban and life narratives of Iranians and their sense of belonging to the city's different urban spaces. We focus on the contrast between Toronto's downtown and its northern suburbs, where the high concentration of Iranian residents has led to the emergence of what is colloquially known as "Tehranto," the city's Iranian neighbourhood.As such, we interrogate the concept of urban diversity and inclusivity by examining the ways in which the stories of diasporic Iranians and Iranian businesses have shaped distinct physical spaces and individual experiences in the city. This research draws on qualitative interviews with members of the Iranian diaspora in Toronto (approximately twenty interviews with entrepreneurs and residents), complemented by ongoing cartographic work that incorporates a range of archival sources, including Persian-language publications such as Shahrvand.

Healing in fragments: 1.5-generation Iranians' well-being trajectories in diaspora
by Shiva Mazrouei / McMaster University / mazroues@mcmaster.ca

A strong sense of identity, community, and connection can have wide-reaching positive impacts on individuals' wellness. Migration (whether by force or choice) is consistently increasing, with many individuals currently residing in countries where they were not born. It is thus important to understand how the trials of this (migration) experience can impact individuals' senses and trajectories of well-being. Continuous waves of migration from Iran have led to the creation of a significant and widespread global diaspora, with an estimated 4-5 million currently living in the diaspora. This presentation explores the question: how do 1.5-generation Iranian immigrants define, experience, and navigate well-being? To explore these queries, I focus on 1.5-generation Iranian migrants in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), which is home to the second-largest Iranian diaspora. Through life mapping, a collaborative arts-based method, combined with semi-structured interviews, I collaborate with participants to define and experience wellbeing. Drawing on research with fifteen 1.5-generation Iranians in the GTA, I explore well-being trajectories for this group, following their migration journeys. Focusing on the 1.5 generation—those who migrated as children or adolescents—offers unique insight into how well-being trajectories in the context of transnational migration interact with formative life stages. The findings highlight how 1.5-generation Iranians in the GTA define wellbeing as holistic and multilayered, and closely tied to belonging and connectedness. Wellbeing trajectories are shown to be shaped by (and influence) transnational relationships to events in Iran, the fragmented nature of the Iranian-Canadian diaspora, as well as shifting family dynamics associated with migration. Finally, I consider strategies employed to sustain wellbeing, including avoidance, community-building, and active forgetting. This empirical and collaborative research highlights the nuanced dynamics of belonging and well-being among 1.5-generation migrants, offering insights that can inform policymakers and community organizations in developing effective programs to support immigrant youth.

From Kharej to Ghorbat: Migration Dreams and Diasporic Experiences of Iranians in Canada
by Sara Hormozinejad / University of Toronto / sara.hormozinejad@torontomu.ca
This presentation examines the social construction of migration desires and their transformation through the settlement process. Drawing on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 30 middle-class Iranian migrants who held citizenship of both Iran and Canada, this study explores two central dimensions of their migration experiences. First, it explores how pre-migration perceptions of Western destinations are constructed and articulated through the Persian metaphor of Kharej (the Western lands), which conveys an idealized and homogenized vision of the West. Second, it examines how these perceptions evolve post-migration toward Ghorbat (the estranged lands), a Persian notion that captures not only physical displacement but also emotional exile. The analysis reveals how Kharej represents a collective fantasy produced through restrictive mobility regimes, diasporic narratives, and media representations. On the other hand, Ghorbat reflects an emergent longing for "home" that often remains an imagined space, shaped by lived experiences of exclusion and the persistence of cultural memory. By conceptualizing the dynamic interplay between Kharej and Ghorbat, the study shows how migration desires are constituted and operate as powerful drivers of mobility, while diasporic experiences become sites of contestation where belonging is reimagined across transnational contexts.

Diaspora politics in Tehranto: an urban analysis of Woman, Life, Freedom movement
by Maryam Lashkari / Toronto metropolitan University / maryam.lashkari2004@gmail.com
Iranian diaspora responses to Woman, Life, Freedom in Toronto call for re-thinking diaspora politics through contestation in urban public spaces. This analysis examines the political engagement of diaspora communities in Tehranto, focusing on its spatial aspect. From artistic performances in urban public spaces to the Global Rally and holding vigils for those murdered by the Iranian state, diaspora

politics aim to echo the voices of protestors in Iran and open up spaces for democratic practices. Drawing on ethnography and social media analysis between September and March 2022, I examine how the Iranian diaspora utilized various audio and visual materials, including slogans, languages, banners, and symbols, to show solidarity and articulate emancipatory politics. To demonstrate the multiplicity of diaspora politics at the urban scale, three public spaces in neighborhoods with a substantial population of Iranian residents, namely downtown Toronto, North York, and Richmond Hill are selected. The analysis shows how the politics of space in Richmond Hill and North York often reflect a nationalistic view on the movement, while protests in downtown areas are characterized by transnational solidarities that go beyond a unified Iranian identity. Through urban geopolitical perspectives, this paper highlights the heterogeneity of diaspora politics across Tehranto, demonstrating how urban spaces turn into contested sites where home is constructed.

Room 1.10

7. Histories of Circulation: People, Books, and Ideas between Iran and India (1500–1800)

Chair: Mahdieh Tavakol | Discussant: Sholeh Quinn

This panel examines the circulation of people, texts, and ideas between Iran and India from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, foregrounding the role of manuscripts as material anchors of mobility, piety, and intellectual life. Emphasizing the dynamic processes of movement and exchange, the papers together highlight how Persianate culture was constituted through circulation itself—across political upheavals, individual trajectories, and devotional practices.

We begin with the paper on conceptual perspective, which analyzes eighteenth-century tazkirahs to probe the relationship between manuscript circulation and the cultural imaginaries that narrated such flows. Focusing on the imprint of political upheavals on textual circulation and literary memory, this paper shows how transregional connections were reconfigured in the wake of imperial fragmentation, and how circulation itself was historicized and remembered.

The second paper turns to the itinerant scholar Muhadhdhib al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Ḥillī al-Baṣrī, whose compilation of treatises reflects a lifetime of movement across Mecca, Medina, Mashhad, Herat, and the Deccan. Through close study of his majmūʿa and its colophons, it reconstructs patterns of scholarly mobility and considers how such collections materialized the transmission of knowledge across shrine cities and centers of learning spanning the Red Sea, Iran, and India.

The third paper examines the movement of manuscripts between India and Iran through endowments by Iranian émigrés in India to institutions in Safavid Iran, tracing the trajectories of books donated by figures such as ʿAlī Gul Astarābādī, Ḥakīm Jibrāʾīl Ḥusaynī, and ʿAlāʾ al-Mulk Tūnī. By situating these acts of pious patronage within broader networks of exchange, it shows how manuscripts functioned simultaneously as devotional offerings and as instruments of intellectual connectivity across the Persianate world.

Together, the panel argues for circulation as a central analytic for Persianate studies, showing how the movement of people and books made possible the shared cultural and scholarly worlds of Iran and India between 1500 and 1800.

Eighteenth-Century Circulations: Imprint of the times on manuscripts and its marks in texts

by Mana Kia / Columbia University / mk3586@columbia.edu

This paper examines the relation between what we know empirically about the material circulation of texts and how circulation is represented and narrated in mid-18th century tazkirahs. Against a background of reference to the mid-17th century, a vantage point of imperial apogee, I trace the imprints of subsequent imperial fragmentation, followed by decades of upheaval and conflict over the mid-18th century, on the circulation of manuscripts, on their representation in texts, on possibilities of tazkirah writing, and reconfiguration of transregional connections. I focus on flows within and between Iran and the subcontinent, with a particular focus on the Deccan. This paper is

part of a larger attempt to think about the relationship between circulations of the material world and the social imaginary as constitutive of transregional Persianate culture and its historically and regionally specific possibilities.

Collecting Islamic knowledge across seventeenth century western Asia – Muhadhdhib al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Ḥillī al-Baṣrī (d. 1084/1673) and his Majmūʿa

by Christopher Bahl / Durham University, UK / christopher.d.bahl@durham.ac.uk

According to some verses tugged away in a compilation (majmūʿa) of Arabic treatises (rasāʾil), the scholar Muhadhdhib al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Damāmīnī al-Ḥillī al-Baṣrī arrived in India in 1080/1669. Specifically, he is said to have served in the Deccan Sultanate of Golkonda over the last years of his life. Today, at least three of his manuscripts survive in the Salar Jung Museum and Library. The said majmūʿa contains a total of 20 treatises in different disciplines from uṣūl al-fiqh, to logic (manṭiq) grammar, rhetoric, to taṣawwuf. Some colophons of those treatises date their completion and the place of writing or copying. As Aḥmad al-Hillī al-Baṣrī travelled from Mecca to Medina, Mashhad and Herat, and finally to the subcontinent, his majmūʿa became ever thicker with knowledge he collected from shrine cities, learned centres, and places of pilgrimage.

This paper will introduce this mobile scholar and the texts he selected on his travels to think about knowledge transmission between the Red Sea region, Iran, and India. What can the patterns of his movements tell us about the mobility of the learned in this period? Did he copy particular texts in particular cities? And finally, did his majmūʿa serve a purpose beyond his personal efforts in collecting knowledge?

Circulating Devotion: Manuscript Endowments across Iran and India (16th–17th c.)

by Mahdieh Tavakol / Universität Hamburg / mahdieh.tavakol@gmail.com

This paper examines the cultural and material entanglements between Safavid Iran and the Indian subcontinent through the circulation of manuscripts. While existing scholarship has largely focused on the inward movement of people, texts, and practices into India and the impact of the Persianate there, this study shifts perspective to the outward circulation of knowledge and material culture from India to Iran. It traces the movement of books between Iranian Shiʿi migrants in India and Iran from the late sixteenth to the seventeenth century, with particular attention to the endowments of émigrés such as ʿAlī Gul Astarābādī, Ḥakīm Jibrāʾīl Ḥusaynī, and ʿAlāʾ al-Mulk Tūnī to religious and educational institutions in Iran.

Rather than focusing on a single figure, the paper reconstructs a broader network of scholars, bureaucrats, and patrons who facilitated the exchange of books between India and Iran. Drawing on endowment deeds, historical library catalogues, and marginal notes in endowed manuscripts, it traces the provenance and trajectories of these collections to show how book endowments functioned both as acts of piety and as instruments of transregional intellectual exchange. By foregrounding manuscripts as material agents, the study highlights their role in shaping a shared transregional space of scholarly and devotional exchange between Iran and India.

Room 1.11

8. From the Alborz to the Caspian: Environmental Histories of Northern Iran

Chair: Amit Sadan, Saghar Sadeghian | Discussant: James Gustafson

Global environmental history has emerged as a dynamic field over the recent decades, yet Iran has remained on its margins. This panel brings northern Iran—especially the Caspian littoral and the Alborz foothills—into focus as a site where ecological imagination, political power, and cultural expression intersect. Spanning from the medieval to the late Pahlavi period, the four papers explore

how landscapes, resources, and environmental perceptions were recorded, mobilized, and represented throughout a millennium of Iranian history.
The panel argues that from chronicles to cinema, the region's water, forests, and mountains emerge as dynamic spaces of livelihood, modernization, and ecological change, acknowledging the opportunities and the costs of development in a strategically vital region.
Paper one explores the environmental history of medieval Iran through Tabari's History of the Prophets and Kings and bioarchaeological data, showing how natural events shaped political legitimacy. Paper two reconstructs the nineteenth-century forest history of northern Iran through Qajar photography, travelogues, and administrative records, linking aesthetic admiration with economic exploitation. Paper three examines Pahlavi-era forestry projects and their global context, revealing how a campaign to "make Iran green again" mirrored ecological visions alongside social contestation. Paper four analyzes Filmfarsi depictions of shomal (northern Iran) as a site of leisure and modernizing aspiration, tracing how cinema transformed the northern landscape into a collective memory of retreat from troubling urban realities. Considered in conjunction, these studies demonstrate that writing Iran's environmental history requires a cross-disciplinary lens attentive to continuity and change. They illuminate how northern Iran's nature has been continually reimagined through political and cultural shifts.

Forestry, Global Scientific Expertise, and State Power during the 1950s and 1960s
by Amit Sadan / University of New Mexico / sadan23@unm.edu
Iranian forests and forestry experienced dramatic transformations during the second Pahlavi era, yet they remain marginal to the historiography of the period's developmental and environmental projects. Within global and regional forest histories, the peculiar Iranian case study defies historiographic contours often marked by sharp distinctions between colonizing regimes and colonized forest communities. Drawing on a diverse array of sources, including state records, institutional publications, localized narratives, and scientific reports, my paper aims to position the history of Pahlavi forestry projects within such scholarly conversations, reflecting on how the forest space fostered contestation and exchange across global, national, and local scales.
The paper traces a burgeoning sense of ecological crisis during the 1950s and 1960s—emerging largely through the dissemination of international, neo-colonial scientific paradigms concerning deforestation and desertification—which spurred a vigorous campaign to "make Iran green again." Aspiring to restore the ostensibly forested landscapes of pre-Islamic Iran, the campaign entailed forceful measures to insert state authority into domains that had previously been loosely governed, including but not limited to the nationalization of all forests and rangelands as part of the White Revolution. Discursively, the campaign also served political-managerial elites in debates over who was entitled to the country's natural resources, contesting claims by forest villagers and pastoralist groups. Ultimately, despite notable operational successes, this crusade suffered from systematic deficiencies, was outpaced by the demands of a rapidly growing population, and even resulted in sociopolitical backlash pertinent in the lead-up to the 1978-79 revolution.

Forests Before Decline: Visual and Textual Traces of the Caspian Forests in Qajar Iran
by Saghar Sadeghian / Willamette University / ssadeghian@willamette.edu
During the Qajar period, the northern forests of Iran were a natural frontier, a source of valuable timber, and a subject of fascination for travelers, officials, and photographers who recorded both their abundance and gradual decline. Yet the environmental history of this region remains fragmented and understudied. This paper reconstructs the history of these forests in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through an integrated reading of visual and textual sources. It argues that contemporary representations paired admiration for northern Iran's natural richness with a

growing awareness of its economic potential. This outlook encouraged intensive exploitation while leaving little room for ecological concern.
Using photographs from the British Library, Golestan Palace albums, the Smithsonian, and British diplomatic archives, the paper connects royal and foreign images with Qajar administrative documents and European travelogues. A notable example is Naser al-Din Shah's 1869 trip to Gilan, accompanied by his court photographer Mohammad 'Ali Khan 'Akkas Bashi, who captured landscapes and royal excursions in some of Iran's earliest environmental photographs. These images complement the Shah's travelogue, providing a rare visual and textual account of the same scenes. Together, such sources reveal a once-extensive landscape of dense forests reaching the Caspian Sea, snow-fed rivers, and villages hidden beneath thick canopies. They also record the region's wildlife—the Mazandaran tiger, leopard, and other large "game" animals now extinct—offering evidence of biodiversity and practices such as timber harvesting, hunting, farming, and trade. The study further examines Persian captions and reports, showing how words like "forest," "meadow," and "river" expressed distinct historical ideas of nature.
The study introduces a new approach to Iran's environmental history, situating the Caspian forests within global debates on imperial science, modernization, and ecological change. This approach positions visual archives as vital evidence for Iran's environmental history and broadens the methodological horizons of the field.

The Making of Shomal: Filmfarsi's Role in Crafting a Site of Memory
by Arash M. Avvali / PhD Candidate, Leiden University / a.mohammadavvali@hum.leidenuniv.nl
The surge in popularity of Shomal, Iran's northern Caspian region, among Tehran's urbanites has fueled widespread deforestation and overtourism, driven by frequent travel and land purchases. For Tehranis, Shomal represents an antidote and escape from the arid, bustling capital—a lush, humid haven and a romanticised "other" Iran of untamed nature and simpler rhythms. This allure partly stems from Shomal's transformation into a "site of memory" (lieu de mémoire, per Pierre Nora), a symbolic landscape embodying the memorial heritage or collective identity of Iranian urbanites. This paper examines how Filmfarsi, Iran's pre-revolutionary popular cinema, shaped this cultural memory by turning Shomal into a repository of shared images, associations, and connotations of nostalgia and aspiration for Iranian urbanites, especially for Tehranis. Through films like Hamsafar (1975), American Mamal (1975), and Honeymoon (1976), featuring iconic stars Googoosh and Behrouz Vosughi, Shomal emerges as a symbolic landscape of freedom, romance, and leisure, contrasting with Tehran's societal constraints. These films depict Shomal as a sanctuary for forbidden love and intimacy, transcending the capital's rigid norms and urban alienation.
By analysing the visual and narrative elements of these films, this study argues that Filmfarsi not only reflected the actual role of Shomal as a leisure destination for Tehran's upper class but also embedded it within the collective consciousness of all Iranian urbanites as a space of emotional and social possibility. Drawing on collective memory theories, the paper demonstrates how these cinematic representations transformed Shomal into a lasting cultural imaginary, a mnemonic site where Tehranis could envision what was lacking in their urban milieu.

How can chronicles allow an environmental history of medieval Iran? The example of Ṭabarī's text (839-923)
by Camille Rhoné-Quer / Aix-Marseille University, France (IREMAM) / camille.rhone@univ-amu.fr
The environmental history of medieval Iran remains largely unexplored. The lack of documentary archives has forced historians to shift their focus: in order to understand the relationship between humans and the environment, it is necessary to turn to other sources, particularly chronicles such as the History of the Prophets and Kings by Ṭabarī (839–923). The text of this major historian, written

within the Abbasid Caliphate from a universalist perspective, favours a political and event-based approach to history. However, Ṭabarī also provides crucial information for understanding the history of relations between populations, power and the natural environment. The question of resources, but also of the landscape and anthropogenic impact of meteorological or climatic phenomena such as droughts, is central to the staging of Islamic power. This study focuses on northern Iran in the early centuries of Islam (7th-early 10th c. CE), particularly in the southern foothills of the Alborz. In this spatio-temporal context, control of the territory is particularly contested (caliph, rival emirs, ambitious generals of local or non-local origin); the question of societies' relationship with the environment plays an essential role in the legitimisation of rulers, who must protect their subjects from the dramatic consequences of events such as droughts and famines. Ṭabarī's information on natural resources and variations in climatic conditions will be compared with data available in the work of bioarchaeologists (archaeobotanists, archaeozoologists) to demonstrate the value and limitations of cross-disciplinary approaches between various complementary disciplines.

Room 1.15

9. Patronage and Governance in Medieval Azerbaijan

Chair: Colin Mitchell

This panel will focus on different aspects of literary patronage, courtly dynamics and administrative practices in Azerbaijan doing the 12th and 13th centuries. On account of the dramatic breadth of the Great Seljuq empire in the 11th c. and the tsunami-like arrival of the Mongols in the early 13th century, smaller, regional polities like the Eldiguzids of Azerbaijan (1136-1225) have been historiographically minimized. This panel is dedicated to examining various aspects of the Eldiguzid court and administration to better understand the degree to which the Atabegs of Azerbaijan - long reduced in conventional scholarship as frontier warlords clashing with Christian Georgians and rival Muslim polities - were in fact self-aware patrons of important literary, cultural and administrative innovators (poets, prose authors, scribes) who were key contributors to the ongoing New Persian renaissance and the promotion of Perso-Islamic culture

The Eldigüzids in the Shaykh Safi al-Din Ardabili Archives

by David Durand-Guédy / independent researcher / david_durandguedy@yahoo.com

[Paper co-presented with E. Sheykh al-Hokamaee]. To finance their courtly and religious patronage, the Eldigüzids (Atabegs of Azerbaijan) needed money. But what do we actually know about them as economic agents? This presentation aims to review the current state of knowledge and, above all, to introduce several archival documents from the Mausoleum of Shaykh Safi Ardabili (in Ardabil, Iran), which provide new pieces of information. These documents, now preserved in Tehran, were either issued by the Atabegs or mention members of the Eldigüzid state. Only two of them are known to date, and even those only partially (G. Herrmann had seen only about 40% of the decree he edited in his Persische Urkunden, 2004). Other unpublished documents deserve consideration. Taken together, they show that, for all their status as rulers, the Eldigüzids were directly involved in the local economy.

Rehabilitating A Frontier Military Governorship: the Eldiguzids of Azerbaijan

by Colin Mitchell / Dalhousie University / c.mitchell@dal.ca

This paper seeks to place the Eldiguzid Atabegate (1136-1225) in a greater context with regard to concepts like patronage, court culture and Persian literary innovation. Turkic Atabegates such as the Eldiguzids controlled territories which were extensions of the massive Great Seljuk empire based in Iran; atabegs were senior Turkic military officers who were charged with the custodial care of a Seljuk royal family member (usually a young son or nephew of the sultan). However, as the Seljuk empire began to wane in the 12th century, some atabegs were adept enough to claim and defend a certain

degree of autonomous sovereignty. This was particularly the case for many of the Eldiguzid atabegs, including Nusrat al-Din Abu Bakr (1191-1210) and Muzaffar al-Din Uzbek (1210-1225). This paper will examine the development of a vibrant court culture in Tabriz, and other centers (Maragha, Nakhjavan, Ganja, Ahar) as these atabegs sought legitimacy and status, not as military slave governors, but as Perso-Islamic rulers living in a decentralized environment. In particular, this paper will examine the patronage of a number of texts (Marzban nama, Munis nama, as well as a number of poetic works by the likes of Nizami, Khaqani, and Zahir al-Din Faryabi) as well as the exploring the legacy of Abu al-Qasim Harun Rabib al-Dawla, who served as vizier to Nusrat al-Din Pishkin (local ruler in Ahar) as well as the last remaining atabeg, Muzaffar al-Din Uzbek.

Persian Prose at the Eldiguzid Court: Literary Style, Education, and Patronage
by Nasrin Askari / University of Toronto / nasrin.askari@mail.utoronto.ca
This paper investigates how literary style in Persian prose reflects the educational, political, and cultural functions of texts produced at the Eldiguzid court of Azerbaijan (r. 1136–1225). Focusing on the Mūnis-nāma and the Marzbān-nāma, it examines how differences in style correspond to differences in authorship, audience, and intended courtly function. The Mūnis-nāma, written by a courtly teacher, uses simple, fluid prose to instruct royal patrons, including women, in statecraft and proper conduct. In contrast, the Marzbān-nāma, authored by a professional scribe, employs elaborate, rhetorically rich prose to display literary skill while also conveying lessons on governance and kingship. This comparison demonstrates that literary style was not merely aesthetic but closely tied to the Eldiguzid court's patronage practices, the authors' initiative, the educational aims of the texts, and the social roles of their authors, revealing the sophistication of this relatively understudied polity within the broader Persianate literary tradition.

Reconfiguring Power in Medieval Iran: Gender, Governance, and the Seljuq–Atabeg Transition
by Amin Mahini / PhD Student in History, University of California, Santa Barbara
Commencing in the ninth century, the political landscape of the eastern Islamic lands underwent profound transformation. During this period, the once-centralized Abbasid Caliphate gradually relinquished its authority, paving the way for the emergence of multiple autonomous states across its provinces, in particular in Iran. This process of fragmentation continued until 1040 CE, when the Seljuqs—a nomadic dynasty of Turkic origin from Central Asia—conquered vast tracts of the eastern Caliphate from Khurāsān. The establishment of the Great Seljuq Empire not only reconfigured regional political dynamics but also left an indelible mark on the history of Iran and the broader Middle East, particularly through the development of innovative forms of statecraft. A salient aspect of this transformation was the enduring political engagement of women, whose participation in governance is documented across a wide range of historical sources. The later emergence of autonomous Atabeg principalities in various regions of the declining empire, including in Iran, underscores the transformative influence of these female actors. The present study examines the status and authority of Seljuq women within the governing apparatus, focusing on the mechanisms through which they contributed to the formation of the Atabeg states. This inquiry draws upon Persian, Arabic, and Syriac chronicles—such as Saljūq-Nāma by Nishāpūrī, Rāḥat al-Ṣudūr by Rāvandī, al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh by Ibn al-Athīr, Rihla by Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, and Bar Hebraeus's Chronicon—alongside secondary literature in English, Persian, Turkish, and Azerbaijani. Analysis reveals that the pivotal role of Seljuq women in the rise of the Atabeg states derived from their traditional autonomy—a legacy of nomadic tribal life that afforded them greater influence than their sedentary counterparts. This authority was further reinforced by the Seljuqs' policy of religious tolerance and by an imperial structure in which young princes ruled under the tutelage of Atabegs, often in alliance with powerful royal women.

Room 1.16

10. Authorship, Desire, and Authority in Persian Literary Traditions

Chair: Abolfazl Moshiri

This panel explores the entangled modalities and refractions of authority— spiritual, authorial, romantic and poetic —within Classical Persianate literary traditions, tracing how poets and Sufi figures from the eleventh to fourteenth centuries constructed and contested legitimacy across political, literary, and spiritual registers. Despite their diverse contexts, from the Ghaznavid court to Anatolian Sufi lodges, these cases reveal a shared concern with how literary expression mediated power, sanctity, and agency.

The opening paper examines Yusof and Zolaykhā, a text long misattributed to Ferdowsi. Rather than dismissing the attribution as forgery, it demonstrates how generations of readers and scribes created a form of collective authorship, invoking Ferdowsi's authority to negotiate spiritual truth and literary legitimacy. The second paper turns to Sanāʾī's qaṣīdas, where the poetics of desire and rhetorical strategies, such as hyperbole and parrhesia, synchronize multiple relationships: lover and beloved, poet and patron, disciple and master. Within these structures, Sanāʾī asserts his own spiritual authority while legitimizing Bahrāmshāh as an ideal ruler. The third paper reconsiders Rumi's poetics of love and longing, challenging centuries of interpretations that erase the possibility of a female beloved. By situating romantic love and desire within Rumi's oeuvre, it foregrounds feminine authority as a central, though long-suppressed, dimension of his poetic inspiration. Finally, the concluding paper studies the figure of ʿĀrif Chalabī, examining how his transgressive persona, combined with heterodox practices, charisma, and strategic alliances, forged alternative modality of authority within the Mevlevi tradition in an era of socio-religious fragmentation.

Taken together, the panel highlights authority and authorship as evolving practices of self-fashioning, negotiation, reception, and legitimation. By situating authorship within the nexus of desire, legitimacy, and memory, the panel contends that classical Persian literati understood the written word as the decisive arena where authority was forged, asserted, and perpetuated across literary, political, and spiritual domains.

Constructing Authorship in Pseudo-Ferdowsi's Yusof and Zolaykhā

by Austin O'Malley / University of Chicago / omalley@uchicago.edu

A versified version of the Jospeh story has been attributed to Ferdowsi from at least the early fifteenth century, and the attribution was widely regarded as genuine into the early twentieth. Ferdowsi's name appears on manuscript title pages and flyleaves, and in headings and colophons. The poem exists in several recensions, and one of the most common contains passages in which the poet purports to repent from "tales of kings," name-checking some of the most prominent heroes of the Shāh-nāma before proclaiming that he will turn to versifying the truth of God's word instead; others allude to legendary events of Ferdowsi's life. By the middle of the twentieth century, however, the attribution was cast into doubt by scholars such as Minovi and Nafisi, and the above-mentioned passages were attributed to unscrupulous scribes. As a now-recognized spurious text, there has been little work on it since.

In the proposed presentation, I take the misattribution to Ferdowsi not as an endpoint but as a beginning, examining how the text came to be attributed to him, how it changed over time in response to biographical legends about him, and how it influenced those legends in turn. I trace the development of the text through philological methods, but rather than searching for an Urtext, I show how generations of scribes and readers made the poem meaningful through the evocation of Ferdowsi's authority in ways that the "spurious/genuine" binary fails to capture. Ultimately, I argue that in the varied prefaces to Yusof and Zolaykhā we see the dynamic procession of a kind of

collective authorship, paradoxically focused on the authority of Ferdowsi as the text's sole imagined author.

Authority and the Poetics of Desire in Sanāʾī's Qaṣīdas

by Parisa Zahiremami / Villanova University / parisa.zahiremami@villanova.edu

This study focuses on the link between spiritual and political authority and desire, a key a feature in the structure of qaṣīdas composed by the twelfth-century Persian poet Sanāʾī of Ghazna (d. 1131 or 1135). Despite the significance of many of his works as early specimens of mystical poetry with a prominent political dimension, Sanāʾī's poems have been studied by only a handful of scholars (e.g. de Bruijn (1983), Lewis (1995), Boylston (2017), Zahiremami (2021)).

This paper provides a detailed analysis of the poetics of desire in Sanāʾī's qaṣīdas, especially his panegyric qaṣīdas dedicated to the Ghaznavid ruler and his patron Bahrāmshāh (r. 1117–1157). The study focuses on two of the main literary and rhetorical devices used in these poems: hyperbole and frank speech (Parrhesia)—tools for Sanāʾī to establish his spiritual authority over his reader (in this case, Bahrāmshāh), to align his spiritual authority with his servitude to his patron, and subsequently to present his views of perfect political authority. The juxtaposition of the desire to assert his spiritual authority over Bahrāmshāh (expressed through frank speech) and the desire to serve his royal patron as a subject (often expressed through hyperbole) helped Sanāʾī to synchronize the lover-beloved, servant-master, teacher-disciple, and poet-patron relationships in his poems. These relationships and their synchronization act as threads that connect the opening of the qaṣīdas (tashbīb) and their trunk (madīḥ), and thus create a firm structure that ultimately manifest Sanāʾī's main purposes: (1) legitimizing Bahrāmshāh as a sanctified authority and an ideal ruler during a politically turbulent time; and (2) showing his power and spiritual authority over Bahrāmshāh by highlighting the importance of his words which must be heeded by the Ghaznavid ruler, i.e., in order for him to match Sanāʾī's portrayal of him.

Feminine Desire and Authority in Rumi's Poetics of Love

by Mahdieh Vali Zadeh / University of Toronto / mah.vali@mail.utoronto.ca

From the earliest modern scholarship on the renowned Persian mystic poet, Rumi (1207-1273), to the latest ones in the recent academic scene, Rumi's love has been interpreted as not physical but divine. The pioneer of British Orientalism, William Jones (1746–1794) has introduced Sufi love as the pious love of human for the Creator and Rumi's as purely spiritual. Jones offers this 'pious love' in the heterosexual language of love in Christian mystical poetic tradition. Fast forward to the present, recent efforts have explored the symbolism of male love in describing divine love in Persian mystical tradition and Rumi (see Mahdi Tourage and Jim Wafer, for instance). None has ever referred to the possibility of the presence of an actual woman as a beloved who became the source of literary inspiration in some of the most enchanting of Rumi's lyrics. Through a historical approach first, this study unveils a female beauty in Rumi's life. It will then analyze Rumi's poetics of romantic love, accentuating feminine authority in the context of his ghazals through a literary lens. Via this exploration, the study challenges centuries of interpretations that have erased the possibility of a female beloved in Rumi's poetry, and it foregrounds feminine authority as a central, though long-suppressed, dimension of his poetic inspiration. To support the argument, the study analyzes selected ghazals from the Dīvān-i Shams, Rumi's lyrical collection, and illustrates how Orientalized and Islamicized translations have contributed to the afore-noted patriarchal understanding. Hence, in a parallel line, the study highlights readers' authority in denying earthly love in Rumi's poetry throughout centuries. In contrast, the study highlights Rumi's text as an arena where feminine authority has been perpetually preserved for centuries, waiting patiently until today when it ultimately finds its way out to breathe freely.

The Third Lion: ʿĀrif Chalabī and the Making of Heterodox Authority in the Mevlevi Tradition
by Abolfazl Moshiri / Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute of Iranian Studies, University of Toronto / a.moshiri@utoronto.ca
One of the most controversial figures in the history of the Mevlevi Sufi Order was Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Farīdūn, better known as Amīr [Ulū] ʿĀrif Chalabī (670–719/1272–1320), the son of Bahā al-Dīn Sulṭān Valad (d. 712/1312) and grandson of the celebrated Persian mystical poet Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273). Despite his central position, hagiographical sources such as Shams al-Dīn Aḥmad Aflakī's Manāqib al-ʿārifīn frequently depict him as an unruly, antinomian, itinerant, and libertine shaykh, one who openly drank wine and engaged in physical intimidation and violence against his opponents. During his relatively short tenure as the spiritual leader of Mevlevis, ʿĀrif Chalabī played a pivotal role in establishing and expanding the authority of the Order across greater Anatolia.
This paper examines the life and legacy of ʿĀrif Chalabī, situating his transgressive persona within the broader landscape of heterodox mysticism and urban Sufi networks in fourteenth-century Anatolia. It argues that as the Mevlevi shaykh, ʿĀrif Chalabī's authority did not stem from his classical Sufi training or scholarly reputation, as was the case for his father and grandfather, but from his role as an authoritative Akhi shaykh and a charismatic hereditary figure. His antinomian conducts functioned not as a liability but as calculated measures to legitimize the authority of the Mevlevis, appealing to a broad and diverse social base. Through his extensive travels and strategic alliances, ʿĀrif Chalabī sought to consolidate the socio-spiritual dominion of the Mevlevis by forging ties between Sufi lodges, Akhi guilds, and local rulers. In doing so, he helped position the Mevlevi Order as a dominant mystical force during a period marked by socio-political fragmentation and religious heterodoxy.

Room 1.17

11. Persian Sufi Poetics: Perspectives from within the Tradition

Chair: Fateme Montazeri

Persian Sufi poetry is often studied as if it were prose—mined for ideas rather than treated as poetry—or else approached through Euro-American literary theories grounded in conceptions of language, knowledge, and reality foreign to this tradition. This panel brings together papers that develop new perspectives on reading and understanding Persian Sufi poetry drawn from within the tradition itself. The poetics of Persian Sufi poetry will be discussed from different viewpoints, including its theoretical tools, language, ritualistic functions, and the application of Sufi theories to the reading of Sufi verse.
The first paper discusses the methodology of approaching Sufi poetics, suggesting that it is best understood as the third dimension of two central features of Arabo-Persian poetry, namely the arrangement (naẓm) of meaning and the creation of wonder. The second presentation highlights the role of the Persian language in the works of ʿAyn al-Qożāt Hamadānī as a spiritually charged pathway to realization. The third paper examines the function of Persian quatrains attributed to Abū Saʿīd Abū l-Khayr, showing how their ritualistic repetition parallels the invocation of divine names in anticipation of supernatural effects. And the final paper offers a case study applying the Sufi theories reflected in the prose text Jām-i Jahān-namā by Shīrīn Maghribī to the reading of the poet's ghazals. Together, these papers shed light on different aspects of Persian Sufi poetics—including its methods, theories, language, functions, and hermeneutics—all rooted in close analyses of the literature, practices, and implications of this very tradition.

The Poetics of Piety – ʿAyn al-Qożāt Hamadānī and The Sacralization of Persian
by Ahmad Rashid Salim / University of California - Berkeley / ahmad.r.salim@berkeley.edu
This presentation expands on the sacred place and placement of Persian as a spiritually charged pathway to realization. I will elaborate with examples of how the sacralization of Persian was

theorized and tethered to a spiritual unfolding and realization. This will be supplemented with selections from my dissertation project which elaborates on a genealogy of this theory and poetics within the Persian literary tradition. Subsequently, the presence and performance of a poetics of piety from the Tamhīdāt of ʿAyn al-Qożāt Hamadānī (k. 1131) will be offered to show the layers and logic of how poetry in general, and Persian poetry in particular, was understood and disseminated as religiously rewarding and spiritually significant. These poems follow reflections and responses from ʿAyn al-Qożāt to the reader(s) and display a deeply felt concern with language, poetry, and the spiritual path. The case is made by ʿAyn al-Qożāt that such poems are not only harmonized with the speech of this world but that of the Hereafter. A brief discussion of the challenges and possible motivations for such an approach will follow. Lastly, a few observations related to the place of subtlety in such poetics will be elucidated.

Persian verse or Divine names? Forgotten Functions of Abu Said's Quatrains

by Fateme Montazeri / UC Berkeley / fatememon@gmail.com

Discussions of the poetics of Sufi poetry and its maʿnā remain incomplete without attention to the ritual and functional dimensions of this literary tradition. This paper examines a little-known application of poems attributed to Abū Saʿīd Abū'l-Khayr (d. 1049): the meditative repetition of quatrains to produce metaphysical effects. Some collections of Abū Saʿīdian poetry present the Persian quatrains as possessing talismanic efficacy, comparable to that traditionally ascribed to the repetition of Arabic divine names. These poems are prescribed for recitation under specific ritual conditions—after ablution, facing the qibla, and in designated numbers and times—to bring about various results, including union with the beloved, fulfillment of desires, protection from enemies, attainment of sustenance, and the healing of illness.

Drawing on four undated manuscripts from the Majlis Library that attest to these ritual uses, this paper traces two distinct phases in the historical trajectory of Persian Sufi poetry as dhikr. In the first phase, reflected in explanatory notes within these manuscripts, mystico-lyrical poems are linked with divine names. In the second phase, the mystical and lyrical dimensions give way to explicit forms of religious supplication that directly address God and invoke the Prophet and other sacred figures. The two groups of quatrains with similar form and performative function yet distinct content—one mystico-lyrical and the other supplicatory cast in rhymed form—allows us to re-examine the question of "meaning" in Persian Sufi poetry.

Keys to the Meanings: Reading the Poetry of Shīrīn Maghribī in Light of His Prose

by Arjun Nair / University of Southern California / arjunnai@usc.edu

Shīrīn Maghribī was an important 14th-century poet and theorist in the School of Ibn ʿArabī. Recent studies have clarified his scholarly and Sufi networks, and have suggested the likely avenues through which he transmitted the teachings of his school, beyond his creative exchanges with poets, specifically the masters of the ghazal (e.g., Kamāl-i Khujandī and Qāsim-i Anwār). Although work is underway to edit his extant prose works, it will be a while before his poetry and prose are readily appreciated together in English. In this paper, I take steps toward this goal, reading Maghribī's poetry in light of his prose, particularly his Jām-i jahān-namā, showing how each one illuminates the other. Maghribī explains that his interlocutors, seekers of the science of oneness (ṭālib-i ʿilm-i tawḥīd), presumably also well-versed in the ghazal tradition, were having difficulty understanding the works of earlier Sufi theorists. Maghribī wrote his Jām-i jahān-namā to give them a general yet comprehensive vision of that science, a picture that also furnished them with the essential theoretical keys (mafātīḥ) for unlocking the door to the world of meanings (bāb-i maʿānī wa maʿqūlāt). For Maghribī and others reading ghazal poetry as Sufis, this door was located nowhere

other than within the beautiful forms of the world of sense perception (ṣuwar-i maḥsūsāt), including those of the ghazal itself.

Pearls of Meaning, Words of Wonder: Reading the 'Depth Dimension' of Early Persian Sufi Poetry
by Nicholas Boylston / Harvard University / njboylston@gmail.com
This paper presents the fruits of a broader research project on Persian Sufi poetry from its origins to Farid al-Din Attar centered on the concepts of ma'nā (meaning) and ta'ajjub (wonder) as both objects of reflection in this poetry and theoretical tools by which it can be more fruitfully interpreted, particularly in so far as it seeks to express the ineffable. This article, drawn from the conclusion of this book project, suggests a new way of conceiving of Sufi poetics, namely as a '3rd dimension' or 'depth-dimension' of poetic art. Drawing an analogy with William Chittick's definition of Sufism as the 3rd dimension of Islam, since, conceived of as 'making beautiful' (iḥsān) is the deepening of practice (islām) and faith (īmān), I suggest that Sufi poetics is best understood as the depth dimension of two central features of Arabo-Persian poetry, namely the arrangement (naẓm) of meaning and the creation of wonder. That is to say, the approach to meaning and wonder in early Sufi poetry, particularly Attar, who I mark as the end of this period, is both continuous and discontinuous with approaches to meaning and wonder in the broader tradition of Arabo-Persian poetry. As such, I argue that early Persian Sufi poetry is best read BOTH through the same theoretical tools we use to read non-Sufi poetry (such as the tools of balāghat) AND with attention to the ways Sufi poets claim to be pointing beyond the poetry thus analyzed. I end by briefly suggesting how this approach can clarify issues that have appeared intractable until now, such as whether the poetry of Hafez should be read as Sufi poetry.

Room 1.18

12. Iranian Studies in Korea

Chair: Yongjeong Kim, Saera Kwak

This panel, titled "Iranian Studies in Korea," provides a comprehensive overview of the field's evolution, breadth, and current research directions within the Republic of Korea. Although the academic institutionalization of the discipline is relatively recent, Korea has been steadily cultivating experts in Iran-related affairs and Iranian Studies scholars since 1976. In recent years, the introduction of national legislation supporting education in strategically important foreign languages has significantly expanded institutional backing and heightened public interest in Persian language and its instruction. Drawing on these advancements, the panel will explore the current state of Persian language education and Iranian Studies in Korea, highlight the ongoing research initiatives of leading scholars, and identify key challenges and strategic opportunities for the field's future development, including potential collaborative approaches, curriculum innovations, and research capacity enhancement.

Phonological and Semantic Shifts in Persian–Urdu Vocabulary: An Exploratory Study Conducted as Part of Ongoing Persian Research in Korea
by Taejin Koh / Hankuk University of Foreign Studies / india@hufs.ac.kr
This study examines the lexical relationship between Persian and Urdu from both historical and linguistic perspectives, aiming to empirically analyze phonological, orthographic, and semantic changes across a dataset of approximately 1,600 Persian–Urdu word pairs. Specifically, it focuses on six major areas of transformation: (i) final vowel correspondences, (ii) variations in the pronunciation of alif, (iii) consonantal alternations and assimilations, (iv) phonological insertions and deletions, (v) contrasts in voiceless aspirated sounds, and (vi) semantic and grammatical category shifts.
The analysis reveals consistent transformation patterns such as the Persian word-final -ه, which is

silent or weakly pronounced, becoming -ā in Urdu; -ی (i) shifting to -ī, and -و (u) to -ū. Additionally, alif is realized as /a, e, o/ in Persian but shifts to /a, i, u/ in Urdu. Several key examples illustrate semantic and grammatical restructuring: umīdwārī (امیدواری) meaning "hope" in Persian becomes "candidate" in Urdu, achār (اچار) transitions from "tool" or "spice" in Persian to "pickle" in Urdu, and ayyāshī (عیاشی) changes from an adjective ("debauched") in Persian to a noun ("debauchery") in Urdu.
These findings demonstrate that Urdu has not merely borrowed lexical items from Persian, but has restructured them systematically in accordance with its own phonological norms, orthographic conventions, and socio-cultural context.

Trends in Iranian Studies in Korea: A Quantitative Analysis of Academic Publications
by Dayeon Chu / Hankuk University of Foreign Studies / chudayeon77@gmail.com
This study aims to analyze trends in Iranian studies in Korea from the past to the present and explore future directions for development based on its achievements and limitations. To this end, the study examines theses and journal articles published to date, collecting data via major academic databases, including Korea's national academic database, the Research Information Sharing Service (RISS). Based on these materials, this study classifies publications by subject area, such as politics, economics, history, and languages, and conducts quantitative analyses of temporal trends. Through this process, the study identifies (1) increases and decreases in research output over time, (2) shifts in thematic composition, and (3) patterns of continuity and discontinuity across fields. Grounded in empirical evidence, this study surveys the achievements and limitations of Iranian Studies in Korea. This can inform proposals for future directions in the field.

Persian language education in Korea
by Saera Kwak / Hankuk University of Foreign Studies / saera_kwak@hufs.ac.kr
This study explores the evolution, current landscape, and challenges of Persian language education in South Korea, with a particular emphasis on the program at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (HUFS), the country's pioneering and sole dedicated department for Persian and Iranian Studies since its establishment in 1976. The research traces the historical progression—from early dependence on foreign textbooks to the development of local teaching materials starting in 1982—and delves into the curriculum's comprehensive structure encompassing language, area studies, and professional training. Language instruction methodically covers listening, speaking, reading, and writing across CEFR-aligned proficiency levels (A1–B2), complemented by advanced courses like translation practice and news comprehension, and increasingly blends colloquial and literary language registers in response to communicative teaching methodologies that emerged in the 2000s. The study contextualizes Persian language education within national policy frameworks by examining the 2016 Special Foreign Language Promotion Act, which recognized Persian as a strategically significant language and facilitated broader public access and skill development. Additionally, it maps the limited yet meaningful Persian language programs at other universities and HUFS's international academic partnerships. Despite recent advancements, ongoing challenges—including diminishing budgets, labor market disconnects, and fluctuating Korea–Iran economic relations—continue to hinder sustainable growth. The research concludes by proposing policy and institutional strategies to stabilize funding, enhance industry connections, and expand technology-driven outreach for learners and the wider public.

Room 2.17

13. Economic and Social Policies and Institutions in Iran, 1920s–1970s
Chair: Mary Yoshinari

This conference panel focuses on the evolution of Iranian economic and social policies and institutions from the early 1920s up to the late 1970s. The three conference papers presented in this panel all deal with topics that go beyond the "top-down" state-building narrative, either by considering the role of railway workers and foreign companies in the interwar formation of the Iranian social insurance system, or by comparing the agency of merchants and industrialists in the postwar transformation of the Iranian Chamber of Commerce, or by elucidating connections between the Iranian government's planning and foreign trade policies and those of their counterparts in Czechoslovakia. On the other hand, the state may be viewed as the catalyst, obstacle or driver of developments in the country's social insurance, commercial, industrial, and foreign trade sectors. While these papers offer contrasting views of state and private-sector development, taken together, they provide deeper understandings of the inner workings of policy and institution-making in the hands of various actors in the Iranian political economy, which unfolded within rapidly changing national and international contexts. At the same time, regional, domestic, and global events had a definite impact on the direction and character of these policies and institutions. Moreover, these papers show that the circulation of ideas, diffusion of power, and tensions between tradition and modernity could manifest themselves in complex and unexpected ways. Ultimately, this panel demonstrates that the Trans-Iranian Railway, the Iranian Chamber of Commerce, and Iran's foreign trade strategy in Eastern Europe played pivotal roles in the modern socio-economic landscape, but also reached certain limitations. Finally, on a historiographical level, this panel advocates for more attention to the analysis of new and understudied primary sources from Iranian and foreign archives.

Iran's Postwar Economic Development and the Czech Connection, 1950s–70s
by Mary Yoshinari / University of Toronto / yoshinari.mary@gmail.com
This paper will discuss Iran's economic relations with Czechoslovakia during the 1950s–70s. This trade relationship was one of diplomatic reengagement and renewed industrial partnership after a promising start in the 1930s had been interrupted by the Second World War. One of its main arguments is that Iranian economic development of these decades was interconnected with the postwar transformation of Eastern and Western European economies. In particular, the paper will examine how development planning in Tehran, which included imports of Czech machinery and exports of Iranian goods, intersected with the interests of its counterparts in Prague within the context of reconstruction, reordering, and growth. Moreover, it will analyze Iranian foreign trade policies and statistics against the backdrop of changes and turning points in the domestic political scene and economic development plans. For example, Iran Almanac 1969 mentions that Iran and Czechoslovakia signed three new commercial agreements in 1968. It will also identify the relevant economic actors of these countries, both in the state and private sectors, while mentioning their trade negotiations and views of such cooperation. Furthermore, this paper asserts that these bilateral ties were guided by pragmatic policies in the international sphere, especially the aim of striking a balance in foreign relations within the new postwar world order. Thus, the paper challenges the extant historiography's narrative of Iran caught in the middle of Cold War political competition between the United States (and the United Kingdom) and the Soviet Union. At the same time, it acknowledges that the boundaries of the Iron Curtain added a layer of complexity to this geopolitical dynamic. In terms of documentary evidence of Iran's strategy, this paper draws upon primary sources from foreign archives and Iranian print media.

The Rise of Social Insurance in Iran and the Trans-Iranian Railway's Role, 1920–1940
by Reza Omidi / London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) / rezaomidi79@gmail.com
Within the context of modern Iranian history, the subject of social insurance has received limited scholarly attention. Therefore, this paper will provide an overview of nascent developments in the

field of labor insurance from the 1920s to the 1940s, placing particular emphasis on the Trans-Iranian Railway project, which had a pivotal role in the establishment of the early Workers' Social Insurance Fund. The ensuing discussion will address the railway project and its potential impact on the design, implementation, and expansion of social policies. It will also demonstrate how the "Road and Street Workers' Insurance Fund" established by this project, with all its shortcomings and limitations, has affected the formation of Iranian social insurance. While addressing divergent hypotheses in the historiography and theories of social policy researchers, this paper will draw upon documents from the Ministry of Roads, the Bundesarchiv, the Iranian Parliamentary Document Center, and annual statistics. In addition, it will examine the role of the many technical workers in different parts of the project, some of whom had experience working in the Caucasus and were familiar with labor organizations and their demands. Moreover, it will assess the influence of social democratic ideas dating back to the Constitutional era that advocated for the prioritization of improved working conditions and workers' rights. On the other hand, it will consider the impact of the cooperation of large German and Scandinavian construction companies, who had been familiar with labor rights and social insurance for decades. Finally, it will discuss how the new Pahlavi government's modernization, industrialization, and state-building drive led to the national railway project's establishment of a social insurance system for workers, which subsequently influenced the formation and development of the Iranian healthcare system.

Institutional Weakness and Economic Representation: The Chamber of Commerce in Pahlavi Iran

by Ali Saeidi / University of Tehran/ saeidi@ut.ac.ir

This paper explores the institutional and economic role of the Iranian Chamber of Commerce during the Pahlavi period (1925–1979), analyzing it as a case study of state–business relations within the context of Iran's modernization and state-led economic development. Drawing on archival materials, economic reports, and business memoirs, the study investigates how the Chamber functioned as an intermediary institution between the entrepreneurial class and the state, and why it failed to develop into a strong economic actor.

The central argument is that the Chamber's institutional power fluctuated inversely with the strength of the central state. In periods of political weakness—such as the early 1950s or post-1960 economic reforms—the Chamber gained temporary space to voice private-sector concerns. However, under stronger authoritarian rule, especially during the White Revolution and the expansion of state economic control, its influence declined sharply, relegating it to an administrative or ceremonial role. Internally, the Chamber was fragmented by competing interests between traditional merchants and emerging industrialists. These cleavages hindered coordinated lobbying efforts and prevented the formation of broader coalitions among Iran's capitalist classes. As a result, collective action was rare, and members often prioritized individual problem-solving over long-term institutional goals.

This historical analysis contributes to the broader field of economic history by highlighting how weak institutional representation, limited autonomy, and elite fragmentation can impair the development of effective capitalist advocacy in semi-authoritarian contexts. It also offers insight into how Iranian economic actors navigated—and were constrained by—the state-dominated structures of the Pahlavi era.

Room 2.18

14. Discourse, Narrative, and Global Frames of the 1979 Iranian Revolution

Chair: Claudia Yaghoobi

Discussant: Mehdi Ganjavi

This panel reconsiders the 1979 Iranian Revolution through the intersecting lenses of global theory, journalistic discourse, and narrative method. The first paper situates the revolution as a paradigmatic event that disrupted Cold War ideologies and compelled a rethinking of revolutionary traditions

worldwide. Drawing on feminist critiques, postcolonial theory, and Western philosophy, it highlights the multiplicity of perspectives through which the revolution was experienced and interpreted, from intellectuals inside Iran to regional actors and international observers. The second paper turns to the Iranian press during the years 1977-79, tracing how newspapers shaped and reshaped the language of revolution. Through a diachronic discourse analysis of over one hundred articles, it shows how key events produced discursive shifts: the Shah's image as guarantor of stability eroded, oppositional voices gained legitimacy, and emotional framings of suffering and resistance emerged. Press practices are shown to both respond to and participate in the production of revolutionary consciousness. The final paper interrogates the limits of Foucauldian discourse analysis, which has often dominated scholarship on the Iranian Revolution. By exposing the epistemological blind spots of this framework, including its neglect of materiality, agency, and affect, it argues that narrative studies provide a more fruitful alternative. By foregrounding lived experience, literature, and the interplay of narrative and revolution, the paper offers a methodological reorientation for analyzing political and cultural transformations in modern Iran. These papers create a layered conversation: from global intellectual reverberations, to the textual practices of revolutionary journalism, to methodological critiques of theory. The panel aims to show how discourse, narrative, and global frames provide a richer, more nuanced understanding of one of the twentieth century's most consequential revolutions.

The Construction of Revolutionary Discourse in Iranian Press: A Diachronic Discourse Analysis
by Masoumeh Rahimi / Vrije Universiteit Brussel. / Masoumeh.Rahimi@vub.be
This paper examines how the Iranian press shaped the revolutionary discourse. I use a corpus of 100 news articles from 1977 to 1979 and adopt a synchronic lens to understand what was sayable and how at key discursive events in time. A diachronic discourse analysis then traces the evolving discursive strategies, including referential and predicational strategies, as well as emotionally charged language choices, using MAXCDA to facilitate data coding and analysis. The results show how subject positions are (de)legitimised, marginalised, or redefined. Ettelaat's discursive shift becomes evident in 1978, especially after the Qom protests and Black Friday. The Shah and his family are gradually replaced by oppositional voices, such as clerics and sometimes intellectuals, on the front page of the newspaper, particularly during periods of high turmoil. The earlier representation of the Shah as a "symbol of stability" gives way to other characterisations, while opposition groups are no longer labelled as "traitors" or "agitators". The newspaper's emotional framing of major events contributes to the construction and reinforcement of a discourse of suffering and resistance. I compare Ettelaat's discursive practices with those of Kayhan and the more liberated Ayandegan, and highlight different patterns and editorial stances in their coverage. Discursive shifts are expected during revolutions; however, this paper discusses how the newspapers fine-tune their discourses to direct censorship and balance between mounting unrest and support for the monarchy. This contribution combines discourse analysis with political and cultural history and depicts how journalism, as a form of cultural expression, both responds to and contributes to political conflict and the revolution in Iran.

The Iranian Revolution as a Global Event of Multiplicities (with Niloofar Hooman)
by Dilyana Mincheva / McMaster University / minchevd@mcmaster.ca
The 1979 Iranian Revolution was not merely an Islamic or nationalist uprising but a paradigmatic rupture in the global revolutionary imagination. This paper situates the revolution as both a local and transnational event—rooted in the intellectual ferment of figures like Ali Shariati, Jalal Al-e Ahmad, and Ayatollah Khomeini—while simultaneously resonating across feminist, postcolonial, and philosophical debates. Rejecting both Marxist and liberal paradigms, the revolution articulated a new

political lexicon grounded in Shi'i political theology and anti-imperialist discourse. Its aftermath exposed the paradoxes of revolutionary gender politics, from women's central role in mobilization to the institutionalization of patriarchy—yet also the emergence of Islamic feminism as a counter-hegemonic force. Engaging with Hamid Dabashi's "theology of discontent," Frantz Fanon's decolonial humanism, and Michel Foucault's notion of "political spirituality," the paper reinterprets the Iranian Revolution as an epistemic revolt that challenges Enlightenment universalism and redefines the meaning of modern revolution from the global South.

From Throne to Theory: Beyond Foucault's Framework in Iranian Revolution Studies

by Kamran Talattof / University of Arizona / talattof@email.arizona.edu

While Michel Foucault's comments on the 1979 Iranian Revolution have been widely discussed, less attention has been paid to the ways his discourse analysis has been applied to explain the revolution itself. This paper offers a critical intervention into the dominance of Foucauldian discourse analysis within studies of modern Iran. By examining the epistemological and methodological limitations of Foucault's framework, its relativism, neglect of agency, and fixation on power, I argue that this approach has often obscured rather than clarified the dynamics of the Islamic Revolution. Indeed, it has contributed to enduring misreadings of Iranian society, from the Shah's reformist agenda to the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and, more recently, the Women, Life, Freedom movement. Foucault's characterization of the revolution as "spiritual" exemplifies how discourse analysis, when applied uncritically, risks legitimizing regressive institutions while overlooking the material, embodied, and affective dimensions of social struggle. Drawing on the works of scholars such as Anthony D. Smith, Paul Hazell, and Homi K. Bhabha, and through textual analysis of prerevolutionary committed literature as well as engagement with the slogans of the pre- and postrevolutionary political movements, I revisit Foucault's theory alongside other problematic frameworks of postcolonialism and Orientalism. As an alternative, I propose narrative studies-- liberated from rigid disciplinary boundaries-- as a more productive framework for analyzing Iran's contested political and cultural transformations. This approach foregrounds lived experience, the affective power of literature, and the interplay of narrative and revolution, offering a path toward rethinking both the study of Iran and the broader application of critical theory to contemporary cultural developments.

Room 2.19

15. Transregional intellectual and literary links within the Persian-speaking world in the 19th-20th centuries

Chair: Edmund Herzig, Kamila Akhmedjanova

This panel will explore transregional links (mostly ideological ones) in the works of Persian-speaking intellectuals of the 19th and 20th centuries. Despite distinct regional peculiarities of national literatures produced in various parts of the Persian-speaking world, at least when talking about the period up to the beginning of the 20th century (before the alphabet change took place in the case of Persian in Central Asia) it is impossible to deny the existence of certain unity. Furthermore, as this panel will demonstrate, the remnants of this unity were preserved even after this alphabet change. This unity allows us to discuss the works of Persian intellectuals from different parts of the Persian-speaking world within this panel (by 'Persian intellectuals' here we mean those intellectuals who lived in parts of the Persian-speaking world and used Persian as a primary language for their writings). This is also in line with the general trends in the developments in transnational and global history, which are getting away from national models.

This panel will include the discussion of the development of social criticism in the works of Dilshād Barnā and Ahmad Dānish (Persian-speaking natives of Central Asia), as well as their contextualisation within the wider Persian-speaking literary and intellectual trends; the analysis of Jalal Al-e Ahmad's critique of the decline of Persian civilization, centered on his concept of Gharbzadegi

("Westoxification"); and, finally, the concept of Persian reciprocity in Muhammadjon Shakuri and Muhammad Osimi's thought. We will thus aim to demonstrate that different parts of the Persian-speaking world were undergoing similar literary and intellectual developments and voiced similar thoughts and concerns in the 19th-20th centuries.

The Concept of Persian Reciprocity in Muhammadjon Shakuri's and Muhammad Osimi's Thought
by Martin Dixon / University of Oxford / martin.dixon@new.ox.ac.uk
Muhammadjon Shakuri (1926-2012) and Muhammad Osimi (1920-1996) may be the two most important intellectuals to emerge in independent Tajikistan. Neither's quite serious thought has been treated much beyond the realm of hagiography.
I outline in this paper the concept of 'Persian reciprocity' common to both, i.e. an outlook where Tajikistan's future must involve close ties with other Persian-speaking countries and ex-Persianate countries for the good of its spiritual health. Indeed this is as much a 'spiritual' as a cultural problem for both thinkers. Both place emphasis on rediscovering or (in the more engagé Shakuri) 'recovering' Tajikistan's Persian-language cultural history as the principal means of achieving progress. The motives, methods and contexts, however, are different. So are the personalities. Osimi was a man of action, which Shakuri was not. Shakuri was a Bukharan, Osimi a Khujandi - a crucial distinction in the putative political order. Curiously prominent in both and in the tradition of Persian intellectual literature to which they refer is the symbol of the heart.
Having sketched both thinkers and their worlds I focus on Shakuri's conception of Persian reciprocity that involves a distinctive reinterpretation of history, outlined in his influential work Khuroson ast in jo (This is Khurasan, 1997) and elsewhere. The roots of Persian reciprocity in Tajikistan, as I intend to show, run deep.

Gharbzadegi and the Decline of Persian Civilization: Jalal Al-e Ahmad's Critique in the Context of Iranian Intellectual Thought
by Iqan Shahidi / University of Cambridge / is482@cam.ac.uk
This paper examines Jalal Al-e Ahmad's critique of cultural decline through his seminal concept of Gharbzadegi ("Westoxification") and situates it within broader intellectual debates of mid-20th-century Iran. While Al-e Ahmad has been the subject of extensive scholarship, studies have rarely positioned his diagnosis of decline in relation to other contemporary Iranian intellectuals, such as Ali Shariati and Javad Tabatabai. Existing research on decline has largely centered on earlier discursive formations—from Qajar-era travelogues and periodicals to émigré publications and Pahlavi-era historiography—without fully accounting for Al-e Ahmad's role in shaping debates on modernization, identity, and resistance to Western influence.
This study addresses that gap by interrogating how Al-e Ahmad's writings engage with and diverge from parallel currents of Iranian intellectual thought, thereby illuminating the shared concerns and contested meanings surrounding decline. The research adopts a dual methodological framework: Reinhart Koselleck's conceptual history, which traces the shifting semantics and temporalities embedded in key terms, and the Cambridge School's contextualist approach, which situates texts within their political, cultural, and discursive milieus. Through this combined lens, the paper reconstructs the intellectual landscape in which Al-e Ahmad intervened and highlights the ways in which his critique of Gharbzadegi both resonates with and challenges the arguments of his contemporaries.
By advancing a comparative and contextual reading of Al-e Ahmad, the study not only refines our understanding of his intellectual project but also contributes to broader discussions of decline as a recurring conceptual axis in Iranian intellectual history.

The legacy of Dilshād Barnā and Ahmad Dānish within the context of 19th-Century Persian-speaking literary and intellectual trends.

by Kamila Akhmedjanova / University of Oxford / kamila.akhmedjanova@sant.ox.ac.uk

In this paper I will situate the legacy of Dilshād Barnā and Ahmad Dānish, natives of Central Asia, within the broader Persian-speaking literary and intellectual trends of the 19th century. This period was marked by the emergence of modernity in the Persian-speaking world, eventually leading to the Constitutional Revolution in Iran and to the development of social criticism in Central Asia. However, my paper will argue against the interpretation of modernity through the Western-centric prism (Zia-Ebrahimi, 2016: 18).

I will focus on Dilshād Barnā's (1800-1905) "Ta'rikh-i muhājirān", in which she describes her life as a teacher in a girls' maktab. I will analyse the relationship between women education and modernity in Persian-speaking Central Asia. Barnā's works (including her poems) contain much more social criticism compared to earlier women writers (e.g. Nādira), and this paper will analyse the reasons for this development. There were similar trends concerning works of elite women writers in early and mid-Qajar Iran (Brookshaw, 2015), and I will draw comparisons to Barnā's Iranian contemporaries.

In the second part of this paper I will compare Barnā's social criticism to the one of Ahmad Dānish (1827-1897). Having visited Saint Petersburg as part of the Bukharan embassy to the Russian Empire, he claimed in his "Navādir al-vaqāyi'" and other works that his own society was in need of social, cultural and political reforms. However, contrary to the Soviet (and even more recent) claims that his progressive ideas were inspired purely by his trips to Russia, this paper will argue that his calls for reform were deeply rooted in the Persian-speaking intellectual trends and that he should be analysed alongside other Persian-speaking intellectuals.

Eventually, I will assess the contribution of these two authors to the emergence of modernity in the Persian-speaking world. Therefore, my paper fits well into the proposed panel.

10:30 – 10:45

Coffee Break

10:45-12:45 Janskerkhof 2/3

Room 0.13

16. Revisiting Reza Shah's Rule at the Centennial of the Pahlavi Monarchy

Chair: Afshin Matin-Asgari

The year 2026 marks the centennial of the Pahlavi Monarchy and the 120th anniversary of Iran's constitutional government. This panel aims to revisit and reevaluate Reza shah's reign particularly in relation to the political, cultural and intellectual legacy of the Constitutional Revolution. Current Reza Shah revival sentiments feed largely on monarchist nostalgia and revulsion toward the Islamic Republic. Our panel seeks to focus proper scholarly attention on this topic by bringing together five senior scholars of early 20th century in a balanced historical reappraisal of the Reza Shah era.

The first paper notes how during the transition from the Qajar to the Pahlavi period, Iran's political elite embraced a particular nation-state model, with political authority highly centralized in the executive branch. This shift marked a turning point from "too little state" in the Qajar era to "too much state" in the early Pahlavi years and beyond.

Deploying a History from Below approach, the second panelist will analyze the character of Reza Shah's modern Iran by looking at how rural and tribal people, the new industrial working class and the urban poor reacted to the Pahlavi monarchy's top-down nation-state building.

The third panelist will challenge the prevalent view of the Reza Shah era as anti-clerical or anti-Islamic. Investigating cultural, educational and religious reforms, it shows how the new Pahlavi

regime promoted a particular brand of clerical Shi'ism subservient to the project of authoritarian modernization nation-building.
The fourth presenter looks back at how Reza Shah era secularism and other modernizing projects were controversial in their own time. The paper engages with broader historiographic issues by looking at the ways historians make the past relevant to the present through subjecting it to probing analytical questions.

The First Pahlavi Era: Intended & Unintended Consequences of Social and Religious Reforms
by Janet Afary / Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies and History, UC Santa Barbara / jafary@ucsb.edu
Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, standard historiography of the Pahlavi era has painted the Reza Shah Pahlavi era as anti-clerical and even anti-religion. These sources argue that Reza Khan presented himself as a devout Shi'i in the early 1920s when he needed the support of the ulama to become the new ruler of the nation, but then turned his back on religious institutions when he embarked on his project of
creating a modern and secular nation. Based on more recent scholarship and a careful reading of publications from the 1930s, this presentation makes two arguments: First, whether intended or not, many social and cultural reforms of the period had dramatic and lasting implications on day-to-day religious practices of the nation, changes that ultimately contributed to the reform of Shi'ism. Second, the Pahlavi
regime was not at all hostile to every ranking religious figure. It only clashed with orthodox clerics AND politically reform-minded ones who publicly opposed the regime's social and cultural agenda. In contrast, the regime lent its support to advocates of a rationalist school of thought in Shi'ism that was open to social and cultural reforms of the state, or if they disagreed, they kept their opinions to themselves. These men were provided with funding, speaking, and publishing opportunities and encouraged to continue their activities, whereas many nationalist, leftist, or religious figures who openly criticized the state were imprisoned or even murdered.

State Transition in Iran from the late Qajar to early Pahlavi Periods: Constitutional Experience, Parliamentarism, and Governance
by Ali Gheissari / University of San Diego / ali.gheissari@gmail.com
The Iranian Constitutional Revolution took place in the summer of 1906. It aimed to change the structure of the Iranian monarchy from arbitrary to constitutional and to adopt representative governance by introducing the country for the first time to a parliamentary system. It resulted in a written constitution in which a separation between different branches of government (the legislative, the executive, and the judiciary) was recognized, at least on paper. In practice, however, these distinctions remained ambiguous. The First Majles reflected these ambiguities: conceived as a legislative body, it was simultaneously expected to legislate, administer justice, and enforce laws, thus creating tensions that soon brought it on a collision with the Crown. This in effect also problematized the traditional and normative paradigm of Qajar sovereignty, in which the monarch was regarded as custodian of the "guarded domains" (mamālek-e mahruseh)—a broad and hardly ever articulated concept which, in spite of all its elusiveness, was as much geographic and territorial as it was linguistic, denominational, military, and administrative.
By drawing on selected range of primary and secondary sources, this paper examines Iran's constitutional experiment with parliamentarism and governance during the critical transition from the late Qajar to the early Pahlavi period. It demonstrates how Iran's political elite increasingly turned toward the nation-state model, with an emphasis on centralized authority. As in several other interwar contexts, this trajectory involved an autocratic path to state formation—yet one that,

despite limited resources at its disposal, sought to modernize core state institutions and lay the foundations of a new administrative and political order. The shift thus marked a transition from 'the reality' of too little state, characteristic of the Qajar era, to 'the idea' of too much state in the early Pahlavi years and beyond.

Significance of Reza Shah?

by Ervand Abrahamian / City University of New York / ervand.abrahamian@baruch.cuny.edu

Reza Shah Panel

Reza Shah had become a lightning rod for politicians and polemicists. For adherents of the Islamic Republic, he was a “British agent”, brought to power by the imperial power, despotic and murderous, anti-religious, personally corrupt and interested solely in his own family--not in the nation. In short, he epitomized all that is distasteful about the old regime. For opponents of the republic, he was a true nationalist, the builder of modern Iran, a true secularist, and, most important of all, the anti-thesis of the present theocracy. The paper will explore why he remain so politically controversial and how far these many claims contain or do not contain a grain of truth—especially the claims he was a nationalist, linked to Britain, a militant “secularist”, and, most important of all, a genuine “modernist” in the true sense of the term. The paper will argue that putting aside the polemics, he was significant in that he created for the very first time in Iran a highly centralized and bureaucratic state. The paper will also raise the question whether such an achievement has now any significance to professional historians studying Iran—or is of interest only for antiquarians. In other words, whether his achievement has real significance for Reza Shah has become a lightning rod for politicians and polemicists. For adherents of the contemporary Iran. The paper will conclude with the important but often overlooked difference between, on one hand, historians who raise and try to answer significant questions about the past, and, on the other hand, antiquarians who describe interesting phenomenon from the past.

Understanding Reza Shah through his opponents

by Stephanie Cronin / University of Oxford / stephanie.cronin@ames.ox.ac.uk

Understanding Reza Shah through his opponents

This paper attempts to interrogate the character of the shah and his rule by looking at the nature of his domestic opponents. It first examines the political conflicts played out between the shah and his opponents. It then goes on to examine to what extent the social changes of the interwar period served to produce a class base for the Pahlavi monarchy in the form of a modernist middle class determined on the eradication of the so-called “dangerous classes”.

The two decades between 1921 and 1941 saw the regime constantly facing opposition of greatly variegated kinds, modern and “traditional,” sometimes local and small, sometimes national and a real challenge to the regime. These episodes ranged from provincially based radical movements to political battles over constitutional change, to the legislative radicalism of the later 1920s, to strikes in the oil industry, to tribal opposition, and finally to conspiracies within the army. Reza Shah’s state-building project was indeed often on the defensive and its conflict with a succession of opponents sharply defined its own character and goals.

There were, however, also battles and eventually a war to be fought much closer to home. In tandem with the political and sometimes violent battles waged by the shah, the 1920s and 1930s saw the launch of a radical programme of social change. This project was key to the cohesion and identity of the rapidly growing Westernized middle class.

The period saw a revolution in social life with a flood of campaigns, to reform prisons on European lines, to rescue prostitutes, to use architecture to oblige people to adopt different forms of family

life, to discuss the nature of criminality, and so on. Thus was fashioned the modern middle class of Iran's cities, a bedrock of the Pahlavi monarchy.

Room 0.17

17. Iranian Art and Material Culture in Switzerland: Toward a New Perspective

Chair: Negar Habibi

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, collecting in Switzerland—much like elsewhere in Europe—was eclectic: Swiss bankers, soldiers, merchants, and art enthusiasts acquired objects from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Although Switzerland was never a colonial power, Swiss collectors undoubtedly benefited from the networks established by the French, British, and Russian empires.

As a result, cities such as Zurich, Bern, and Geneva hold a considerable number of artefacts from the Islamicate world, including many from Iran and Persianate societies. Although often overlooked by younger generations of scholars, Swiss collections of Iranian art and material culture are exceptionally rich, encompassing artistic masterpieces ranging from illustrated manuscripts and album folios to metalworks, carpets and textiles, penboxes, and ceramics.

This panel seeks to address why such collections—with their immense potential for Iranian studies—remain relatively unknown and under-studied, and how new connections, research, and connoisseurship may be fostered.

First speaker presents the Iranian collection of the Museum Rietberg in Zurich, reflecting on the challenges of exhibiting the cultural legacy of a country now subject to political sanction by Western authorities. Second speaker highlights Swiss investment in Persian carpet production and introduces a unique collection in Zurich. The thirdi explores Geneva's significant potential for Iranian studies by presenting four major collections of Iranian art preserved in the city. Finally, the last speaker focuses on a specific case study: the Persian paintings of the Museum of Art and History in Geneva, still largely understood through the scholarship of Basil William Robinson some thirty years ago.

This panel aims to draw attention to Switzerland's Iranian cultural heritage, rarely known to the wider public, and to interrogate the challenges, opportunities, and difficulties scholars face when working with these collections.

Iranian Heritage in Geneva: From Collection to Exhibition

by Negar Habibi / Mossadegh Foundation Lecturer of Iranian Studies / negar.habibi@unige.ch

In the nineteenth century, Geneva, like many other European cities, became a vibrant hub for the trade of Islamicate arts and material culture. Collectors and connoisseurs avidly acquired ceramics, carpets, and metalworks, which later enriched the holdings of the city's public museums and institutions. Islamicate arts in Geneva largely revolve around Iranian material culture and related traditions from Persianate societies such as North India, Central Asia, and Afghanistan. Since the mid-nineteenth century, these collections have been steadily enriched. Today, the Ariana Museum, the Museum of Art and History (MAH), the Museum of Ethnography (MEG), and the Martin Bodmer Foundation preserve some of the most significant collections in Switzerland. Comprising nearly 2,000 objects, these collections have, however, been only rarely studied or exhibited to the wider public. This paper highlights Geneva's rich Iranian cultural legacy by tracing the history of these collections and the ways in which they entered the city's institutions. By analyzing their potential for Iranian studies, it further examines the history of occasional exhibitions devoted to them, as well as the challenges, gaps, and opportunities encountered when working with museum archives and curators.

The Transnational Carpets of Ziegler & Co.: Rolling between Tehran and Zürich

by Kimia Maleki / Johns Hopkins / kmaleki1@jhu.edu

The third floor of an unexceptional residential building in central Zürich is packed with nineteenth-century Persian carpets made by one of the first European enterprises active in Iran. Ziegler & Co. (1874–1934), a Manchester-based Anglo-Swiss company, produced and exported distinctive Persian carpets in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, leaving a legacy of natural dyeing, weaving big motifs, and large-sized carpets tailored for Western houses. Never shown and published before, this presentation takes into account the story of Ziegler & Co. and its carpets brought by Emil Alpiger, the company's manager, and his family to Switzerland. In this presentation, I study the carpet production scene of nineteenth-century Iran to shed light on the role of Persian carpets in shaping the modernization, soft-imperialism, and nationalism in the broader art production of nineteenth-century West Asia. Examining the objects and archival materials, my presentation elucidates the nuanced meanings carpets gained through political, social, and artistic movements alongside scholarly contributions in the late nineteenth century. By studying the infiltrated role of carpets in Swiss households, my presentation examines their role as pivotal players in the assembly of artworks involved in larger processes of transfer and exchange, providing a clearer understanding of art and culture from Iran and their relationship with European taste and intervention.

Understanding Museum Representation: Toward a Better Accessibility of Persian Art in Geneva
by Quentin Arnoux / University of Toronto / quentin.arnoux@mail.utoronto.ca
The Musée d'Art et d'Histoire (MAH) houses one of the largest collections of Persian art within European institutions, comprising approximately 600 objects such as manuscript paintings, single-page paintings, and drawings donated by the French diplomat and collector Jean Pozzi (1884–1967). This collection offers a comprehensive overview of the art of the book in Iran from the 13th to the 20th centuries and highlights the importance of Geneva and Switzerland as a center for Iranian studies. This paper argues that despite its richness, the collection is not currently advertised or made accessible to the public and researchers in a way that reflects its full potential. The analysis focuses on the methodological and museological challenges involved in displaying Persian art at Geneva's museum, whose mission as a public institution is to foster dialogue by connecting audiences with art from diverse regions and periods. This paper also examines how inherited discourses, such as the continued reliance on Basil W. Robinson's scholarship and his catalogue of the collection, still shape the interpretation and representation of this significant cultural heritage.

Iranian Art Revisited at the Museum Rietberg
by Axel Langer / Museum Rietberg / langer.axel@bluewin.ch
Museums dedicated to non-European art in the so-called West, and in Europe in particular, face major challenges in light of political, demographic, and technological change. These challenges become even more complex when it comes to art from Muslim-majority countries. Debates around labels such as Islamic Art or geographically defined terms like Art of the NEMA region or Art of West Asia reflect not only academic concerns but also attempts to counteract growing prejudices against Islam as a religion. At the same time, a declining interest in historical contexts—and in some cases a waning curiosity about foreign cultures altogether—further exacerbates the situation.
Against this backdrop, it is worth asking what strategies museums and curators might develop to challenge prejudice and stimulate interest in the cultures of the Islamic world in general, and the Persianate sphere in particular. Since the Museum Rietberg is planning to renew its permanent galleries, this paper takes the presentation of Iranian art as a case study and a starting point for broader discussion. It will explore how museums might invite audiences to enjoy and appreciate original works of art while also engaging with their historical and cultural contexts. Special attention will be given to the roles of atmosphere and emotion in exhibition design—how they shape

perception, how they can foster deeper connections with the artworks, and what such approaches might look like in practice.

Room 0.19

18. Innovations and Challenges in Teaching Persian Language and Culture: Interdisciplinary Approaches in Persian Studies

Chair: Azita Taleghani, Mahbod Ghaffari

International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme and Persian Diaspora Students: Preserving or Losing the Mother Tongue
Fatemeh Faroughi

Using Contemporary Persian Films in Language Teaching: Bridging Linguistic Competence and Cultural Literacy
Mahbod Ghaffari

Persian Performed: Performance Pedagogies across Song and Stage
Behzad Borhan

Teaching Cultural Narratives through Women-Centered Iranian Films: A Cultural Semiotic Approach for Course Content Design
Shadi Shajiei

Room 0.21

19. Navigating the Margins: A Transnational Perspective on Iranian Women's Music-Making

Chair: Hadi Milanloo

This panel examines Iranian women's access to musical spaces in Iran and the diaspora. Using ethnographic methods, it interrogates the complex interplay of familial, sociopolitical, and transnational forces that shape women's marginalization in music. Moving beyond documenting Iranian women's exclusion, it reveals the strategies they employ to navigate and challenge systems of oppression. Spanning homeland and diaspora, this panel illuminates women's diverse roles as singers, educators, and instrumentalists across Iran's contemporary history and complex cultural landscapes.

First presentation examines women's singing pedagogy in post-revolutionary Iran through Maryam's case, a teacher navigating surveillance and regulation. Drawing on interviews and observations, it shows how state-authorized music classes paradoxically legitimize and constrain women's musical activity, exposing tensions between institutional normalization, control, and female agency within legal musical spaces.

Second presentation focuses on Iranian female singers after 1979 to ethnographically analyze how political bans intersect with family, class, and regional factors. It highlights women's adaptive strategies—private performances, digital sharing, protest participation—and shows how their voices embody resilience and defiance, sustaining cultural expression and contesting gendered boundaries in restrictive environments.

Third presentation analyzes a female musician's innovative approach to online music education during the COVID-19, arguing that the restrictive conditions of Iranian women's participation in music can generate new forms of agency. It suggests women's persistent negotiation with social/structural constraints has cultivated a capacity for flexibility, experimentation, and boundary-crossing.

Fourth presentation explores the artistic transformations of Iranian female instrumentalists after migrating to Canada. Drawing on fieldwork in Toronto and Tehran, it examines how they renegotiate professional identity and aesthetic principles, as well as forge new transnational alliances with other racialized women to reestablish their careers in a new country. This paper situates the experiences of

Iranian female musicians within the broader transformations of the Iranian diaspora in North America.

Transnational Transformations: Women and Iranian Classical Music in Canada
by Hadi Milanloo / University of Toronto / hadi.milanloo@gmail.com
A growing subfield of scholarship has analyzed the condition of female musicians in Iran, with a particular focus on singers and the official ban that has prohibited them from performing solo in public since 1979 (e.g., Chehabi 2000, Mozafari 2013, Assadollahi 2023). This scholarship offers invaluable insight into the strategies that Iranian women employ to battle their exclusion. However, it overlooks the stories of female musicians who, like numerous other Iranians, have left the country in recent decades. My paper addresses this gap by concentrating on aesthetic transformations and strategic alliances among female instrumentalists of Iranian classical music who have migrated to Canada over the past 10 years. While the exclusion of Iranian women from musical spaces since 1979 has been well-documented, I ask how the nature of these women's musical participation changes within a diasporic context. Drawing on my current fieldwork in Canada and previous doctoral research in Iran, I situate these female musicians in a global context, investigating how they grapple with the marginalization of their music. As they establish their careers in new countries, they renegotiate their aesthetic principles, redefine their professional identities, or reframe their career trajectories. By examining the new transnational alliances they form with other artists, I link their struggles for equity and equality to those of other racialized women. My paper expands the scholarship that situates Iranian diaspora within the broader racial politics of North America (e.g., Maghbouleh 2017, Sadeghi 2023) and adds a new dimension to the studies that investigate the inner workings of Iranian diasporic productions and their transnational networks (e.g. Ebrahimi 2019, Hemmasi 2020, Yaghoobi 2023).

Singing Under Surveillance: Women's Music Education and Resistance in Post-Revolutionary Iran
by Sepideh Raissadat / University of Toronto / sraissadat@hotmail.com
In the aftermath of the 1979 Revolution, the Islamic Republic of Iran prohibited women from performing solo before mixed-gender audiences — a restriction that remains in force more than four decades later. According to official regulations, female voices must appear in choirs, be accompanied or "covered" by male voices, or be confined to female-only spaces. Despite these limitations, many women have continued to pursue solo singing in private domains such as singing classes, recording studios, informal gatherings, and, more recently, online platforms.
This paper examines state-authorized female singing classes between 2000 and 2023, focusing on the case of Maryam (pseudonym), a singer and teacher. Her experience reveals a tightly regulated pedagogical environment in which government oversight extends from attire and classroom discourse to the projection of women's voices. The institute where she teaches is under constant surveillance, with CCTV cameras operating as panoptic mechanisms that instill fear and uncertainty among participants.
Drawing on interviews and virtual observations of Maryam's teaching sessions (2018–2023), as well as analysis of her students' gatherings, this study explores how both teachers and students negotiate and resist state-imposed constraints. These pressures have curtailed Maryam's teaching and limited her public presence; over two decades, she has performed publicly only a handful of times, largely avoiding concert permits or digital exposure to protect her position.
Despite the government's pervasive control, my research shows that female singers adapt to these constraining yet dynamic settings, and subtly reshape the boundaries of musical expression, transforming regulated classrooms into zones of trust, resilience, and quiet resistance.

The Politics of Musical Participation: An Ethnographic Research on the situation of Female Singers in Post-Revolutionary Iran

by Yalda Yazdani / Independent Researcher / yalda.yazdani53@gmail.com

The position of female singers in Iran has been shaped by a combination of political regulation, cultural norms, family expectations, and socio-economic conditions. Following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the legal ban on solo female singing in public settings imposed significant restrictions on women's participation in music. However, these constraints interact with other influences, including family attitudes, ethnic identity, religious affiliation, education, social class, and regional differences, all of which affect access to musical training, performance opportunities, and audiences. This research draws on ethnographic fieldwork, including interviews, participant observation, and documentation of performance practices, to examine how female singers navigate these interrelated challenges. It identifies a range of strategies women employ to sustain their musical engagement: performing in private or women-only gatherings, embedding singing within socially approved events, sharing music through digital platforms, and participating in underground or cross-border collaborations. The research also addresses the involvement of female singers in recent protest movements, particularly those associated with the slogan "Woman–Life–Freedom." In these movements, music has served as both a medium of personal expression and an act of political resistance. By considering the interaction between legal prohibitions, social structures, and individual agency, this research demonstrates the resilience and adaptability of Iranian women who continue to sing despite multiple layers of restriction. It highlights how their voices challenge established boundaries, contributing to broader discussions on gender, cultural expression, and artistic resistance in post-revolutionary Iran.

Creating from the Margin: A Feminist Reading of Limitation and Possibility in Iranian Music

by Solmaz Shakerifard / Seattle University / solmus@uw.edu

In this paper I examine a virtual roundtable discussion on Music Pedagogy during the COVID-19 Era, held via Instagram Live in Tehran on June 16, 2021, featuring three Iranian musicians and educators—two men and one woman. While the male participants emphasized the limitations and losses brought about by the shift to online teaching, the female musician described her transition to virtual pedagogy as seamless and even productive since she had already incorporated virtual lessons into her practice long before COVID due to her students' issues with mobility and access. Her experience invites a reconsideration of the relationship between marginality, resilience, and creativity within Iran's musical landscape.

Drawing on Saba Mahmood's notion of agency (2005), I suggest that the very constraints Iranian female musicians encounter can themselves generate creativity and open new possibilities. The female (or otherwise marginalized) musician's ability to 'improvise' within structural and social limitations reflects a form of agency that is grounded in adaptability and persistence rather than overt opposition. Following Sara Ahmed (2017), I propose that such "feminist willfulness" has cultivated a capacity for flexibility, experimentation, and boundary-crossing that unsettles rigid and dominant aesthetic readings of Iranian classical music.

By analyzing this roundtable discussion through a feminist lens, I reframe Iranian female musicians as creative agents who continuously reimagine participation, authorship, and presence. Their practices reveal an understanding of music-making that resists patriarchal definitions of authority and tradition, proposing instead a radical vision of inclusion–one that insists on having a seat at the table not as token participants but as legitimate and transformative contributors.

19. Constructors of an Image

Chair: Juan Cole

This panel looks at how images of Iran have been constructed in Europe and North America since the early modern period and into the present. It begins with diverse accounts of the Timurid court by authors from Europe. Some were ambassadors and one was enslaved. The nature of their constructions of Iran, the Persianate world, and Timur himself are considered, and the absence of classic Orientalist tropes in their writings is theorized. The second paper looks at travel accounts of Safavid Iran by two Dutch authors, one an adventurer and the other a naturalist. One gives an unadorned account of daily life, including that of the enslaved, while the other provides a unique set of visual depictions, with precise information on Isfahan and neo-classicist engravings of Iran's monuments. The third paper considers the impact of Edward FitzGerald's Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám on the thinking and poetry of nineteenth-century poet Algernon Swinburne, especially his 1862 "Laus Veneris." He made FitzGerald's poem, with its aaba rhyme scheme taken over from the Persian the model for his own poem. The paper examines the ways in which his championing of a medieval Iranian poetic sensibility challenged the mores and strictures of Victorian society. The final presentation is a close reading of the reportage on the students who climbed the gates of Tehran University in March 1879 and on those who climbed the gates of the U.S. embassy later that year. It looks at the gender biases and Orientalist ambiguity in Western journalism that occluded the action of women protesters at the university incident but highlighted a seemingly decisive image of male activists scaling the gates of the American embassy compound. The panel aims at drawing a long bow, considering centuries of image-construction concerning Iran in the early modern and modern global North, in hopes that examining these tropes in concert with one another will shed light on the phenomenon.

Algernon Swinburne's Rubáiyát: Sexual Liberation and Political Liberty

by Juan Cole / University of Michigan / jrcole@umich.edu

Algernon Swinburne discovered Edward FitzGerald's loose translation of the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám in the early 1860s soon after he left Oxford without earning a degree. A proponent of "anti-theism," sexual liberation and republicanism, Swinburne was enchanted with its metaphysical skepticism and Epicurean counsels. The verses' dismissal of theology and metaphysics and their advocacy of sarcasm and satire toward the very ground of being powerfully appealed to the young Swinburne's rebellious spirit.

He made FitzGerald's poem, with its aaba rhyme scheme taken over from the Persian the model for his own "Laus Veneris" (In Praise of Venus), written in 1862 and not published until 1866, after which it became the subject of a renowned painting by Swinburne's friend Edward Burne-Jones. Based on a medieval legend, Swinburne's series of robā'is tell of the knight, Tannhauser, who is captivated by the goddess Venus when he sees her bathing in the forest, and with whom he then dwells in a grotto. He eventually manages to leave, and seeks absolution from the Pope, who declines. Thereafter Tannhauser wanders, damned, unable to escape the grasp of passion and sensuality.

Swinburne wrote,:

There is a feverish famine in my veins;
Below her bosom where a crushed grape stains
The white and blue, there my lips caught and clove
An hour since, and what mark of me remains?

The poem is the first of many uses in English of the form of the Persian robā'i. It also, however, marked a new era in Victorian poetry, as the queen's insistence on moralizing verse was increasingly challenged. That the challenge came in some sense via medieval Iran points to the increasing impact on the metropole of colonial cultures, as Edward Said argued in Culture and Imperialism.

Threshold Goddesses: Climbing the gates of Tehran University, March '79

by Negar Mottahedeh / Duke University / negar@duke.edu
Hearing that groups of protesting women were making their way to Tehran University where celebrations for the first International Women's Day after the Revolution were underway, women who had gathered on campus went out to meet them that afternoon. They found, to their utter frustration, that they had been locked inside the university gates. "Locked
with chains. By fanatic Islamic youths," Kate Millett writes in Going to Iran, "and so they climbed the great iron fences of Tehran University—if we could have seen that, photographed it." "Oh imagine that photograph!" Millett rants on her whisper tapes to the French feminists joining her on her visit to Iran, "That would make a cover!"
What did "make a cover" a few months later, of course, was the picture of a group of men climbing the iron fences and walls of the US embassy in Tehran and the historic demands of the revolutionaries in the course of the 444-day hostage crisis.
This paper reflects on the absent iconic photograph of women scaling the gates and walls of Tehran University as emblematic of a revolutionary moment steeped in ambiguity – an ambiguity that elided the American news cycle in its privileging of a more definitive image of revolutionary fervor.

Western Travelers to the Court of Timur
by Sholeh Quinn / University of California Merced / squinn@ucmerced.edu
Several European travelers left their impressions and opinions of what they saw and experienced at the Timurid court. Among these writers were (1) Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo (d. 2 April 1412), who wrote his account of the embassy sent to deliver a letter and messages of good wishes to Timur from King Henry III of Castille, (2) Bertrando de Mignanelli of Siena (d. 1460), who eventually came to live in Damascus as a well-off businessman, after having traveled through various parts of the Near East in his earlier youth. He describes Timur's 1400 attack on Damascus, (3) Jean Archbishop of Sultaniyeh (d. ca. 1412), and (4) Johann Schiltberger (d. ca. 1440), who came to the court of Timur not as an ambassador, but as a servant and was enslaved by Sultan Bayazid I and then Timur. Given the wide variety of backgrounds of these travelers, it is no surprise that they provide diverse accounts of their of opinions and impressions of Timur and his lands. These travelers lack many of the traditional "Orientalist" attitudes one might find in some of their 19th century counterparts. This paper will analyze their writings in greater details in order to determine the nature of their constructions of Iran, the Persianate world, and Timur himself.

Dutch Perspectives on Safavid Iran (moved to slot 1)
by Rudi Matthee / University of Delaware / matthee@udel.edu
Since the Dutch were actively involved in Safavid Iran, they naturally wrote about the country and its people. The bulk of their reporting consists of commercial records, which were mostly factual, business-oriented, composed for practical purposes. Their other impressions are contained in (a limited number of) travelogues.
My paper will try to answer some of the questions raised by this material. One concerns the perspective on Iranian society evinced by the agents the Dutch East India Company, the grounds for their frequent complaints about Iranian obfuscation and duplicity.
After probing the reasons for the paucity of Dutch travel writing on early modern Iran—odd given the status of the United Provinces as the heart of the "Republic of Letters"—the second half of the paper will examine the two most prominent Dutch published travel writers, who also happen to be each other antipodes in terms of style and content: Jan Struys and Cornelis de Bruyn. The former was a semi-literate sail maker whose adventure story, Disastrous Travels through Russia and Persia (1676), is a fascinating mix of fact and fiction in a genre of dramatic stories with often catastrophic ending that was very popular in the second half of the seventeenth century. De Bruyn, by contrast,

was a cultivated man, a classically trained painter in touch with the luminaries of his time who originally went to Iran to visit Persepolis and whose Travels via Muscovy to Persia and India (1711) is invaluable for its naturalist descriptions of the country's landscapes, with a focus on its flora and fauna.
Both made their own contribution to our knowledge of Safavid Iran, one by offering a narrative without artifice that includes surprising details taken from real life, including information about slavery in the Caucasus; the other by painting a fresh picture of Iranian society, with precise information on especially Isfahan, a unique set of visual images drawn with great precision, illustrating his narrative with countless neo-classicist engravings of Iran's monuments, cast in an often bucolic setting, yet faithful to the "original," indeed more life-like in their exactitude than any previous work on Iran.

Room 0.22

20. Gendered Constraints and Aesthetic Expression in Iranian Film and Visual Production

Chair: Adela Chiru

Since the late 20th century, Iranian cinema has been shaped by strict systems of censorship and surveillance that regulate not only speech but the visibility of gendered bodies and desires. Yet, within these restrictions, filmmakers have continuously redefined the expressive possibilities of the medium, translating constraint into aesthetic innovation. This panel explores how Iranian visual and cinematic production from 2000 to 2025 negotiates the state's gendered politics of representation and reconfigures aesthetics as a mode of resistance, reflection, and subjectivity.
From the tradition of allegorical storytelling and minimalism to the emergence of essayistic, hybrid, and music video forms, contemporary Iranian artists articulate agency and critique within and through the apparatuses of control. Examining the intersections of censorship, visual ethics, and gender, this panel addresses not only how bodies, desires, and gazes are policed across visual production, but how artists reimagine spectatorship, intimacy, and authorship under opacity, exile, and precarious visibility.
The first paper, Aesthetics of Metareflexivity, Deliberation, and Affective Liminality as Forms of Expression under Gendered Censorship, traces Jafar Panahi's evolving response to censorship from The Circle (2000) to It Was Just an Accident (2025), highlighting narrative metareflexivity and sonic displacement as ethical gestures of resistance. The second, Touch without Touching: Poetic Resistance and the Aesthetics of the Unseen in Maryam Tafakory's Films, situates Tafakory's essayistic montage within feminist and decolonial frameworks, revealing absence and silence as radical visual grammars. The final paper, Gendered Expressions in Music Videos by Payam Ghorbani, analyzes how queer performativity and semiotic play in contemporary Iranian music videos challenge heteronormative codes through experimental visual language.
Together, these presentations articulate a dynamic field where constraint becomes form, censorship becomes critique, and aesthetic practice becomes an ethical mode of inhabiting and imagining gendered subjectivity under surveillance.

Gendered Expressions in Music Videos by Payam Ghorbani

by Siavash Rokni / McGill University / siavashrokni@gmail.com

Music videos have been a subject of scholarly analysis since their popularisation with MTV (Keazor & Wübbena, 2010; Osborn, 2021; Railton & Watson, 2022). They are popular cultural products among Iranian musicians and are used promoting their music, but also as vehicles for communicating and conveying messages to audiences. This paper looks at music videos created by Payam Ghorbani and analyzes the ways in which the artist uses visual language to express diverse gender expressions. The paper begins by giving an overview of the artist's background and works. It then focuses on the music called Booseh (2020) made for the artist Milad Bagheri as a case study. The paper uses queer

theory, specifically the notion of gender performativity by Judith Butler (2006)as a framework to show how heteronormative ideas about gender are questioned in the video. To do this, I use semiotic analysis (Way & McKerrell, 2017) to interpret the visual language in the video. The paper concludes by arguing that Ghorbani uses visual language as means of queer expression in a society that is not accepting of queer people.

Touch without Touching: Poetic Resistance and the Aesthetics of the Unseen in Maryam Tafakory's Films

by Adela Nicoleta Chiru / University of Bucharest / adela.chiru@lls.unibuc.ro

How can a forbidden gesture become an act of resistance through cinematic language? This paper examines Maryam Tafakory's poetic-essay cinema through three interconnected frameworks - feminist film theory and the gaze (Mulvey, 1973), decolonial/transnational feminism (Lugones, 2010), and the aesthetics of the essay film (Marks, 2000) - focusing particularly on Irani Bag (2020) and Nazarbazi (2022). Tafakory's distinctive video-essay form constructs a grammar of absence, intimacy, and censorship that both exposes and subverts patriarchal and colonial regimes of the visible.

In Irani Bag, Tafakory collates scenes from post-revolution Iranian cinema (1990–2018) in which handbags mediate physical separation between men and women, objects that stand in for touch when touch itself is forbidden. Through her split-screen editing and textual overlays, the bag becomes a semiotic vessel of intimacy and control, embodying what feminist film theory identifies as the coded language of desire under prohibition. Refracted through Laura Mulvey's concept of the male gaze, Tafakory's montage instead reclaims a feminine spectatorship that sees through state surveillance and cinematic censorship.

Drawing from decolonial feminist theory (Lugones, 2010), the study situates Tafakory's archival interventions as a re-signification of both Iranian and Western visual epistemologies. By reassembling fragments of silenced Iranian film history, she articulates what can be called a decolonial ethics of looking, unsettling colonial assumptions about agency, desire, and representation in Middle Eastern women's cinema. Within the tradition of the poetic-essay film, her works merge lyrical montage and theoretical reflection, transforming citation and silence into aesthetic resistance.

Ultimately, this paper argues that Tafakory's cinema enacts a uniquely feminist politics of translation - between image and word, body and object, visibility and erasure - leading us to ask: what forms of touch, intimacy, and political expression can emerge when cinema itself is forced to "touch without touching" (Tafokory, 2020)?

Aesthetics of Metareflexivity, Deliberation, and Affective Liminality as Forms of Expression under Gendered Censorship

by Maryam Kolly / UCL Université Catholique de Louvain Bruxelles / maryam.kolly@uclouvain.be

How has the relationship between state censorship and cinematic expression evolved in Iran from 2000 to 2025—particularly in its gendered dimensions—and how can Jafar Panahi's work, from The Circle (2000) to It Was Just an Accident (2025), help us interrogate this trajectory? In a context where the regulation of female bodies and the restriction of inter-gender relations in public space remain central tools of control, Panahi's films offer a complex interplay between regims of visibility/representation (Mitchell 1994, Moxey 2008, Mirzoeff 2011) and these constraints.

Over the years, Panahi has faced bans on distribution, surveillance, imprisonment, and official prohibitions against filmmaking. These consequences have not only affected how his films are produced, but—more crucially for our inquiry—how his narrative forms have evolved in response (Hall 2019).

Panahi increasingly turns to mise en abyme (Calandrio 2008), layering stories within stories to blur the line between fiction and documentary. These narrative structures beside create a "stage" for

ethical deliberation, embedding a critique of censorship within the form itself. Humor introduces a tone of dissonance, disrupting the pathos of revolt in an tense contradictory style. At times, sound takes precedence over image, evoking the presence of what cannot be shown—echoing to visual censorship.
The 2022–2023 “Woman, Life, Freedom” uprisings serve as both context and catalyst. The acts of civil disobedience led by Iranian women resonate with Panahi’s long-standing cinematic resistance. His films become dialogic with the revolutionary moment, amplifying its emotional and political charge while challenging the codes of state censorship through subtle yet incisive narrative disruptions.

Room 1.09

21. The Politics of Positionality: Critique and Self-Critique in the Study of the Iranian Diaspora in Western Europe, Turkey and Canada

Chair: Rasmus Christian Elling

This panel aims to foster debate about key methodological, ethical and political questions that arise from the study of the Iranian diaspora in Western Europe, Turkey and Canada.
As four researchers engaged in a Danish-Norwegian joint project, we investigate the specific entanglements of the diaspora with homeland, host country and geopolitics. Through extensive fieldwork, we map diasporic actors as they relate to each other, to Persian-language digital publics and to the influence of transnational institutions and political currents.
We do so, however, from four very different personal, ethno-racial, national and professional backgrounds. With an Iranian diaspora community divided along ideological, class, ethnic, gender and other faultlines, and given the sensitivity of the topics in which we engage, our different positionalities and identities have raised a series of broader, interrelated methodological-ethical issues that we believe should be topic of professional debate. Hence, for this panel we will explore how issues of trust, transparency, differences, (cultural) translation, online-offline dynamics, and the politics of funding impact research, writing and community engagement.
Presenter 1 will address the ethical challenges involved in researching Shiite Islamic communities under intense public scrutiny and the criminalization of Islam in Western European countries.
Presenter 2 will explore the difficulty of building trust when engaged in critical studies of ethnic minority identity politics in a diaspora in Canada and Western Europe often dominated by Persian-centric, nationalist and rightwing sentiments.
Presenter 3 will reflect on methodological and ethical challenges in conducting fieldwork among Iranian journalists and activists in North America, Western Europe and Turkey subject to sudden, drastic changes in the global humanitarian aid and democracy promotion landscape under Trump 2.0.
Presenter 4 will discuss the merits and pitfalls of ethnography in the Iranian diaspora in Denmark that arises from the particular positionality of being addressed as an "honorary insider" (by profession) while being emphatically an outsider (by ethno-national background).

Honorary Insider, Emphatically Outsider: Positionality and Ethnography in the Iranian Diaspora in Denmark

by Rasmus Christian Elling / University of Copenhagen / elling@hum.ku.dk

In this paper, I will discuss how being a white Dane, and one of just two professors of Iranian Studies in Denmark, occasions a very particular and peculiar positionality when doing fieldwork among the Iranian diaspora in Denmark.
To write a political history of the Iranian community in Denmark from 1978 to 2022, I have engaged in a long series of individual and focus group interviews that straddle the line between oral history interviews and episodic narrative interviews. The interview situations, however, is often framed by

the fact that the interlocutors already know me from news media interviews about current affairs in Iran, and possibly also as author of popular history books and articles about Iran. Obviously, not everyone agrees with my analysis and yet as a public figure, there are often strong expectations to me act as a sort of "voice for Iranians", preferably a voice echoing what my interlocutors say. These expectations are further heightened by the fact that I know Persian and have lived in Iran. Interlocutors sometimes expressly project on me a sort of "honorary insider status" as somehow privy and already-informed; yet at other times, they address me as an outsider who can arbitrate with academic and specifically non-Iranian authority. At other times, I must actively work against the role of "host country representative" so that interlocutors can share freely about their experiences in a society marred by xenophobia and racism; and yet other times, I must act diplomatically when faced with certain essentialist, nostalgic or chauvinist sentiments during interviews.
Each of these positions or positionings -- and my positionality -- bring both limits and opportunities to the ethnographic endeavour and raises questions about power, knowledge and method. These are topics that hopefully should concern our field in both practical and more political terms.

“Open to Work”: Iranian Women Activists Facing Defunding Measures under Trump 2.0
by Kristin Soraya Batmanghelichi / University of Oslo, IKOS / k.s.batmanghelichi@ikos.uio.no
This paper presentation explores the geopolitics of (US) funding and its impacts on the livelihoods of Iranian women journalists and activists. Following President Trump's Executive Order 14169, titled "Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid," US-funded humanitarian aid and development programs were paused for 90 days to conduct a review. A subsequent Executive Order, “Continuing the Reduction of the Federal Bureaucracy,” signed in March, targeted federal agencies, including the United States Agency for Global Media, which oversees Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). The negative consequences for Iranian aid workers and activists promoting human rights within Iran have been significant, with those at Persian Voice of America and Radio Farda left momentarily unemployed and their projects on freedom of speech abruptly halted. For diaspora-based Iranian women journalists and activists, particularly those in media and aid projects related to women and gender, there have been feelings of being specifically targeted as the Trump administration officially recognized only two sexes, aiming to eliminate “radical and wasteful” diversity, equity, and inclusion programs in federal agencies. Based on interviews with Iranian women in media and advocacy sectors, this research investigates how they navigate perplexing US policy measures, unemployment, loyalty questionnaires, and/or external pressures from the Iranian government. Beyond their reflections on this global de-funding crisis, what tensions, challenges, and ethical idiosyncrasies emerge when funding schemes are altered? What insights can be gleaned from (US) donor and recipient dynamics, diaspora politics, and themes of transparency and accountability in democracy-centered projects?

How Universal Are Research Ethics?
by Minoo Mirshahvalad / University of Copenhagen / mirshavahminoo@gmail.com
To what extent can research ethics established at European universities be considered universal? Are these protocols applicable in all research contexts? Is it possible to study a social group that is not only minoritized but also criminalized while fully adhering to them?
These are the questions I faced during a decade-long ethnographic study of Shia religious groups in Europe. Over this period, I observed that research ethics, as defined in European academia, cannot always be considered universally acceptable or applicable. In the case at hand, two interrelated issues challenge their implementation: one concerns the researcher, and the other the researched. Regarding the first point, When a researcher is Muslim-born and studies Muslim communities, ethical norms must protect not only the privacy and safety of participants but also those of the

researcher. This is due to the cultural and religious contexts in which Islam still does not accept a Muslim-born individual publicly identifying as non-Muslim. Such a declaration can jeopardize both the feasibility of research and the researcher's safety. Therefore, a non-Muslim Muslim-born scholar cannot always fully disclose their positionality to the researched group.
Concerning the second point, namely the safety of Muslim participants—especially in post-9/11 Western contexts—a preliminary period of trust-building becomes essential. This phase should not be devoted to data collection but rather to allowing the community to know the researcher as a trustworthy individual. This is particularly crucial when studying Iranian Shia Muslims, who have become highly vulnerable due to the rise of Iranophobia in Western media. For female researchers, this challenge is even greater, as their attire becomes an immediate marker of positionality and belonging. This paper argues for a contextualized approach to research ethics that takes into account the researcher's positionality and the sociopolitical vulnerabilities of the studied community.

Building Trust and Conducting Critical Research in Polarized Diaspora Communities: Navigating Iranian Identity Politics in Canada

by Ehsan Kashfi / University of Copenhagen / kashfi@ualberta.ca

This paper examines the methodological and ethical challenges of building trust and conducting ethnographic fieldwork when engaged in critical studies of Iranian diaspora identity politics in Canada. The Iranian diaspora represents one of the most politically, ideologically, and religiously fragmented diasporic communities, facing polarization from multiple directions: rising nationalist and right-wing sentiments in North America, and simultaneously, the growing influence of nationalist, monarchist, and right-wing movements within Iranian diaspora communities themselves. This dual polarization creates uniquely complex research environments where every aspect of the research process becomes contested terrain.
This paper thus narrates how researchers navigate communities divided not only by pre- and post-revolutionary migration waves, secular and religious orientations, and political allegiances from monarchists to regime supporters, but also by the increasing prominence of Iranian nationalist discourses that often align with or mirror right-wing host country politics. Within diaspora spaces, competing narratives about Iranian identity, including debates over Pan-Iranism, ethnic nationalism, secularism, gender politics, and nostalgic constructions of pre-revolutionary Iran, intersect with host country anti-immigrant rhetoric and Islamophobic discourses in ways that complicate traditional insider/outsider research dynamics.
These political tensions directly impact methodological choices and research design, transforming the research process itself into a political battleground where researchers risk being positioned as political actors regardless. Events such as the Woman, Life, Freedom movement have further intensified these divisions, with competing factions claiming authentic representation of Iranian identity while deploying exclusionary rhetoric against internal others. Traditional ethnographic methods such as participant observation become complicated when community spaces are sites of intense ideological conflict and surveillance. Decisions about interviews, focus groups, sampling strategies, and data collection must account for security concerns, community gatekeeping, and risks to both researchers and participants. The paper further analyzes the multi-directional negotiation required in polarized contexts: between researcher and participants across political divides, among community members with opposing ideological orientations, between Iranian populations and Canadian society, and between different ethnic, religious, and political subgroups within the diaspora itself. More importantly, it explores how researcher positionality (ethnicity, religiosity, gender, generation, political history) positions scholars differently within community power dynamics and influences which research questions can be pursued, which methods can be safely employed, and how data can be analyzed and disseminated.

Room 1.10

22. The Letter and the Spirit: Law, Legal Norms, and the Making of Modern Iran, 1919-1979

Chair: Peyman Jafari, Bita Mousavi

This panel tracks shifts in twentieth-century Iranian politics and economy through an exploration of the law. As British hegemony waned in the postwar decades and the U.S. consolidated its ties across the Persian Gulf, law, and Iran's adherence to international legal norms, helped clarify the position and parameters of the Pahlavi state. Even as the government intensified its appeals to rights and reform, however, its increasingly unilateral rule emptied the law of statutory process. Law, as a condensation of the contradictions that characterized mid-century Iran, offers a compelling point of entry into a time when the rhetoric of rights assimilated specific disputes over labor, land, and political legitimacy into the universalizing language of justice.

Our papers trace and historicize this tension across four sites. The first follows Iran's changing relationship to the International Labor Organization 1919 to the 1970s to reveal how selective legal compliance enabled Iran, in its role as an energy-producing buffer state, to navigate the competing demands of British-backed industrialization, U.S.-sponsored development, and anti-colonial politics. The second investigates land reform legislation in the 1950s and 1960s, when property relations and agrarian ecologies were restructured away from subsistence production and provincial patronage toward, in line with prevailing ideas about economic transition, productivity and surplus. A third examines the debates of the 1979 Constituent Assembly, which suppressed rival conceptions of tawhid and "economy" to produce a new revolutionary order under the banner of unity. The fourth analyzes how human rights, as doctrine and discourse, functioned, across both Pahlavi and early revolutionary states, to sanction rather than to prevent violence through show trials and executions.

The Legal Life of Land

by Bita Mousavi / New York University / bsm360@nyu.edu

This paper examines land reform legislation in Iran from the tentative redistributions of the 1950s to the sweeping Land Reform Law of 1962. The postwar Pahlavi state's early measures, limited to crown estates and select villages, offered redistributive gestures while leaving Iran's highly stratified systems of land ownership and tenure intact. By contrast, the 1962 law, backed by reformist politicians, signaled both a new level of redistributive ambition and a new low in statutory process, with the ratification of the White Revolution through the roughshod 1963 referendum catalyzing the 15 Khordad uprising and indirectly influencing the revolutionary politics of the following decade. Drawing on state archives, the paper makes three arguments about the context and consequences of this abrupt pivot toward land reform. First, it situates Iranian agriculture within the global "agrarian question" to argue that in Iran, land reform did not arise as a counter-insurgency to peasant rebellion but from an elite effort to rationalize the anachronisms perceived to have prevented capitalist transition. Second, at the intersection of Cold War geopolitics, international monetary instability, and postcolonial state-building, land reform, although billed as the abolition of "feudalism" and the rationalization of subsistence production, contributed to the erosion of consultative legislation and of the credibility of the law. Finally, the paper reflects on the disjuncture between the reform's interest in the making of a modern national space and ongoing struggles over Iran's subsurface wealth. While reform targeted agrarian estates, some of the most consequential struggles of the same decade concerned Iran's subsoil mineral wealth, underscoring the historical entanglements limiting the exercise of sovereignty.

Swinging like a State: the International Labor Organization and Iran's Quest for Sovereignty, 1919-75

by Zep Kalb / Princeton University / zep.kalb@gmail.com

This article examines Iran's remarkable relationship to the International Labor Organization between 1919, when Iran became a founding member, to the mid-1970s, when the ILO started losing global influence.
Prior to WWII, Iran was an active ILO member but disregarded its social standards, resulting in Iran having some of the most regressive worker protections in the world by the late 1930s. After the war, Iran's approach shifted radically, with the government becoming an ILO devotee and wholeheartedly endorsing the organization's core principles.
The article proposes that these ruptures illustrate the transition from interwar British support for unchecked industrialization in "the East" to Third World socio-economic development under US global hegemony. Combining with mass upheaval in the mid-1940s, these imperial transitions prompted Iran's ruling elites to completely rethink their approach to labor governance.
At the same time, Iran's swing influence in the international labor movement and the anti-communist bloc persisted, obtained through early ILO membership, (anti-)colonial history, and geopolitics. In the 1960s-70s, Iranian state elites mobilize these sovereignties to practice an increasingly assertive decolonial politics within the ILO, with lasting consequences for Iran, the United Nations, and global capitalism.

Human Rights Tribunals
by Arash Davari / University of Minnesota, Twin Cities / davar008@umn.edu
Pahlavi Iran played host to the first International Human Rights Conference in 1968. The regime privileged state rights and economic justice over individual protections, consistent with legal precepts from the 1948 Universal Declaration (Slaughter 2007). An analogous practice resurfaced after the 1979 revolution, ironically, in trials of Pahlavi officials accused of human rights abuses. In this case it paired with a countervailing approach. During the 1970s, activists used human rights discourse to undermine the Palavi state, favoring publicity and spectacle over constitutional norms. The trials sought to induce shame in advance of summary executions.
Existing criticism claims violence was made possible either by human rights doctrine (Arendt 1951) or human rights discourse (Moyn 2010). This paper considers violence at the intersection of doctrine and discourse. It examines public discussions about show trials after the fall of the Pahlavi state in periodicals and pamphlets. Rather than attribute these oddities to Islamic ideology or revolutionary fervor, I read them for inconsistencies in postwar liberalism. Why did leftist and Islamist activists invoke the Nuremberg trials, despite shared reprimands against liberal governance?
The paper relates this facet of Iranian history to debates about historical periodization. Human rights discourse facilitated the birth of neoliberal economic policy in the 1970s (Slobodian 2018, Whyte 2019). Meanwhile, the resurgence of nationalism is said to mark the demise of globalization. The show trials suggest overlaps between 'neoliberalism' and 'nationalism' at odds with conventional periodization. Public shaming reminiscent of human rights discourse facilitated friend/enemy distinctions used to justify retributive punishment for crimes against an imagined political community and its economic interests, consistent with principles underlying human rights doctrine. These overlaps echo arguments for continuity between the Pahlavi state and the Islamic Republic (Harris 2017) and, further, between neoliberalism and the period said to follow it (Slobodian 2025).

The Constitutional Struggle over the Economy in Post-Revolutionary Iran
by Vahid Mazdeh / University of California, Berkeley / vahid.mazdeh@gmail.com
This paper revisits the debates at the Assembly of Experts, which was tasked with reviewing and revising the draft constitution of the Islamic Republic. It focuses on the disputes about the economic organization of the new order. The paper shows why and how "the economy" emerged as a

battleground in which the Islamic and revolutionary credentials of different actors in the post-revolutionary power struggle were measured.
As in the Constitutional Revolution, the 1979 Revolution was preceded by efforts at Islamicizing internationally salient ideas. Whereas in the former, the focus was largely on indigenizing juridico-political concepts, in the latter efforts were also directed at translating economic thought into Islamic language. "_Tawhidi_ society" was one product of this discursive strategy, which successfully concealed its essential socialism under an Islamic garb. By the time of the Revolution, the concept had gained enough support amongst certain segments of the revolutionaries to have entered the draft constitution under review by the Assembly. This paper shows why the concept came to dominate the constitutional debates over the economy; how it served as a measure of the Islamic authority and revolutionary credentials of various post-revolutionary actors; and why it was ultimately removed from the final version of the Islamic Republic Constitution.
The paper departs from the existing literature's preoccupation with "Islamic economics"--what it is and whether it qualifies as a viable alternative to capitalism or communism. It argues that Islamic economics should be viewed as as an improvised solution to a constitutional impasse, not a theory derived from Islamic tradition or copied from Marx or Smith.

Room 1.11

23. Unpackaging Modernisation: the Manifestations of Reform in Iran, 1900-79

Chair: Siavush Randjbar-Daemi, Guan Kiong Teh

The years 1900-1979 transformed Iran. At the turn of the twentieth century, the Persian state wallowed in weak leadership in the shadow of Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar, with many facets of the state operating virtually unchanged for centuries. By December 1979, Iran found itself several months into an unprecedented Islamist government that had toppled centuries of monarchical rule in February, ten months earlier. Some changes occurred in relatively short bursts, as evidenced in the emergence of masculinity idealisations and the impact of these idealisations upon Anglo-American-Persian relations during the Constitutional Revolution (1905-11), and of the Iran National Peykan's contribution to the global evolution of the concept of a 'national car' in the mid-twentieth century. Others were more drawn out, as exemplified in the relevance of Persian coinage to the evolving perpetuation of national cohesion narratives during the late Qajar and Pahlavi eras, and the discourse surrounding the transformation of the bureaucrat with a view towards Western definitions of bureaucracy during the first half of the twentieth century. This panel interrogates the relevance of the concepts of modernisation, westernisation and development to the Iranian narrative through a mix of close-up and broad accounts. Together, these accounts demonstrate that while the revisionist and somewhat cynical narrative of continuity over change has merits, it overlooks key mechanisms and frameworks in the making of modern Iran. At a time where misunderstanding of the Middle East has reached unprecedented levels in Western popular discourse, it is high time to critically re-examine the origins of modern-day states in the region – starting with Iran.

The gender politics of British and US relations with Iran during the Constitutional Revolution, 1905-11.

by Jan-Willem Gray / University of St Andrews / jwng1@st-andrews.ac.uk

A number of scholars have explored British and (to a lesser extent) American attitudes towards the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (1905-11). Some have investigated indigenous Iranian calls for better treatment of women during this period. Iranian newspapers, politicians, and writers (male and female) who were sympathetic to the call to improve Iranian women's lives often used an imagined "West" as inspiration for what a better life for women would look like. Such scholars also recognise Iranian women's active participation in the constitutional movement. Often, these works demonstrate that some Westerners, exemplified by W. Morgan Shuster's The Strangling of Persia,

supported and benefited from Iranian women's political activism. However, these studies do not offer a sustained investigation of how gender politics, including Western and Iranian perceptions of masculinity, influenced the ways that Western governments interpreted developments in Iran in real time. Nor do these studies examine how Iranians attempted to combat or instrumentalise these (often condescending) Western attitudes. Drawing on English and Persian-language sources, including diplomatic documents, newspapers, and memoirs, this project examines how ordinary Iranians influenced Iran-Western relations during a period when several century-old Western assumptions about Iranian society were challenged. In doing so, it reframes Iranian women as significant contributors to Iran-Western relations during the Constitutional Revolution.

The 'national car' and its discontents: Mohammad Reza Shah's development of the Iran National Peykan, 1965-79.

by Guan Kiong Teh / Insitute of Iranian Studies, University of St Andrews / gkt1@st-andrews.ac.uk

The conceptualisation of the Iran National Peykan as a 'national car' between 1965 and 1979 was symptomatic of the transformative political and socioeconomic change in late Pahlavi Iran. Mohammad Reza Shah's encouragement of Iranian entrepreneurism after the passing of the White Revolution Referendum (1963) imposed patriotic narratives upon consumerist participation. In doing so, he courted the loyalties of a growing middle class, tapping into their desire to purchase cars and contribute to the development of the Iranian automotive industry. The role of corporate marketing strategies in shaping the sociopolitical dynamic of Pahlavi Iran is well-studied. However, the emergence of a de-facto national car in the Peykan has not yet received significant academic attention.

The Peykan's contribution to nationalistic narratives in Pahlavi Iran was significant: in 1955, only 55,000 vehicles were registered in Iran. By the 1979 revolution, over one million Peykans alone were in circulation in Iran. Its contribution was also unique compared to that of vehicles of 'national car' status in other counties for two significant reasons. Firstly, the vehicle originated as a badge-engineered version of the Hillman Hunter – a British marque owned by the Chrysler Corporation. Secondly, Mohammad Reza Shah's active involvement in its launch and subsequent marketing facilitated the Peykan's exceptional emergence as the Iranian national car. The legacy of the Peykan project remains evident to present day, as Iran still boasts the highest rate of car ownership per capita in the Middle East. This presentation accounts for the Iran National Peykan's spectacular commercial success in a country where car ownership was only accessible by a small elite demographic on the eve of its launch in 1965, highlights its unusual development trajectory compared to other vehicles regarded as a 'national car', and comments on the implications of these findings upon narratives of exceptionalism in Iranian history.

From Mostofi to Ebtehaj: The Changing Face of the Iranian Bureaucrat, 1900-1966

by Hannah Hassani / University of St Andrews / hassanihannah@gmail.com

At the turn of the twentieth century, the preeminent image of a bureaucrat, that is, an administrator rather than a politician working for the central Iranian government, would have been a mostofi, a traditional accountant. The mostofis occupied typically hereditary positions due to the closely guarded accounting methods (they wrote in a convoluted siyaq script) and their private possession of records (there were no state repositories). They and the monshis (secretaries) constituted the core of skilled administrative labour headed by their Chiefs (mostofi al-mamalek and monshi al-mamalek). By the mid-twentieth century, this class had ceased to exist. The leading bureaucrat of the day was Abol Hassan Ebtehaj, the son of a mostofi from Gilan, who started as an employee in the Imperial Bank of Persia, went on to head the Bank Melli, and founded the Plan Organisation. His skills ranged from private banking and finance to economic development, industrial organisation, and modern

management of public institutions. A unique and controversial figure, Ebtehaj nevertheless symbolises a major societal transformation. The traditional Iranian administrator, once derived from a narrow social base and trained in an esoteric script to fulfil a primarily approbatory role, had now been pulled from the nascent 'middle class', trained in the West or in Western sciences and letters, and served the nation as a technocratic manager. How did this change occur? This paper will examine the new administrative structure and practices of the Iranian state following the Constitutional Revolution (1906-7) that led to the emergence of the new bureaucrat, and the persistence of the old bureaucratic mindset in the form of the new government employee.

Myth, Meaning, and Future: Pahlavi's Iconography and Persian Revivalism in Times of Crisis
by Bita Nienhaus - Naghashian / British Museum's Department of Money and Medals and the University of St. Andrews' School of History / bn35@st.andrews.ac.uk
This paper explores how the Pahlavi dynasty in Iran employed historical and mythic iconography on coins, banknotes, and medals to project national identity and future aspirations as a result of, and during, moments of crisis. The British Museum's visually significant collection of coins, banknotes, and medals from the Pahlavi period is the primary focus of this study. The paper contextualizes this body of material within the Pahlavi period, enduring many transformations and existential crises. Drawing on hermeneutic theory (Dilthey, Ricoeur), it argues that myth acts as a dynamic, future-oriented structure of meaning. It actively links the past and its meanings to the present, generating them into the future and forming new myths in the process. This view conceptualizes myths as manifestations of life that carry and generate values, offering societies symbolic resources for meaning-making—particularly in times of profound existential or cultural crises. In Ricoeur's terms, such boundary situations—war, suffering, or national humiliation—demand renewed narratives of identity and continuity. Myths provide a response to such crises by reconnecting communities to their "mythical nucleus," which serves as both the ground and determinant of their identities.
From this perspective, the examination of iconography on coins and banknotes is not merely an analysis of historical representation but an inquiry into how meanings are projected into the future and how they represent collective imagination and identity. Through symbols, myths, and national narratives, these systems mediate between historical memory and future aspirations.
This paper contributes to the modern history of Iran from an iconographic and modern mythology perspective as one of the seldom works on the treasuries of the British Museum. As part of the panel entitled "Unpackaging Modernisation" this work contributes to a broader discussion on Pahlavi modernisation, its foundations, and material expression.

Room 1.15

24. New approaches and methods in the study of modern Iranian history

Chair: Khosrow Tousi, Robert Steele

The historiography of modern Iran has expanded and evolved considerably over the past couple of decades. The emergence of new historiographical trends and theoretical approaches, and the development of innovative methodologies have encouraged historians to carry out important work on hitherto unexamined subjects, enriching our understanding of the state, society and culture of modern Iran. Analyses of modern Iran through the lens of global and social history have resulted in pioneering studies on labour, decolonisation and the Cold War, emerging fields such as environmental history and histories of technology have significantly altered how we study the past, while the exciting possibilities of a 'biographical turn' have more recently been questioned.
This panel brings together established historians of modern Iran to reflect on recent developments and examine the prospects for future study. The panel explores how the discovery of new sources has helped to shape historical debates, but also how the absence of primary source material has led to the exploration of inventive research methods. The first presentation explores the nascent field of

environmental history, long established in Western historiography, but only recently integrated into Iranian Studies. The paper investigates not only how the field can shape studies of the environment in Iran, but how studies of the Iranian context can potentially challenge established discourses influencing the global field, and thus contribute to broader theoretical discussions. The second paper asks how the field of aviation diplomacy can contribute to the decentring of superpower frameworks in Cold War historiography. Through an examination of the Iranian national airline, Homa, in the 1960s and 70s, it explores how Iran utilised culture and technology to assert its independence internationally, challenge other nations (including its allies), and project its vision of modernity on the global stage. The third presentation examines the contribution of memoirs and biographies to the study of theatre history in late Pahlavi Iran. It questions their reliability as historical sources and ultimately how biography can deepen our understanding of social and cultural history. The fourth presentation discusses the concept of revisionism as a central component of history-writing. It focuses on the late Pahlavi period and the Iranian Revolution to demonstrate the evolution of scholarship over the past half century, showing that history is constantly being re-written.

Writing or re-writing history? Revisionism in the historiography of Pahlavi Iran and the Iranian Revolution

by Robert Steele / Institute of Iranian Studies, Austrian Academy of Sciences / r.steele1@gmx.com

The writing of history is shaped by evidence and interpretation; any historian's approach to and analysis of historical events is influenced by their beliefs, the era in which they live, the historiographical trends of that era, political circumstances and so on. Because no single historian writes from the exact same vantage point as another, the discipline of history is fundamentally an ever-changing dialogue, with new generations of scholars building on the work of their predecessors, adding new sources, context and perspectives. However, there has been little serious scholarly study of revisionism as a central component of history writing within the historiography of modern Iran. Building on James M. Banner's The Ever-Changing Past: Why All History is Revisionist History, this paper explores the phenomenon of changing historical interpretations in the historiography of modern Iran, focusing in particular on the late Pahlavi period and the Iranian Revolution. By exploring the historical literature of these periods, the article demonstrates that there are as many interpretations of the causes of the Iranian Revolution as there are historians of the Iranian Revolution, and that each work of history is essentially revisionist. Far from being a problem, the paper argues that this diversity, this plurality of interpretive frameworks, is something to be celebrated. After exploring how revisionism has enriched the field of modern Iranian history, the paper ends by discussing emerging fields which offer exciting avenues for further research not only on the history of Pahlavi Iran and the Revolution, but all areas of modern Iranian history.

Iran Air and Aviation Diplomacy: Rewriting Iran Cold War History

by Golbarg Rekabtalaei / Seton Hall University / golbarg.rekabtalaei@shu.edu

Cold War historiography has long been dominated by narratives of US-Soviet rivalry. While recent scholarship has worked to decenter superpower frameworks through a "global turn," studies of Iran continue to privilege Iran-US relations during this tumultuous period. In this paper, I argue that examining culture and technology together allows us to challenge conventional histories of the Cold War during the Pahlavi era. My new research on the advent of Iran's national airline, Iran Air (known by its acronym, Huma) amidst the White Revolution (1963) intervenes in three overlapping historiographical conversations.

First, this work challenges the US-Soviet binary by highlighting Iran's agency in Cold War geopolitics. Iran Air's simultaneous aviation agreements with Non-Aligned nations, partnership with Pan American Airlines, outreach to China, and growing aviation ties with Israel reveal how Iran leveraged

commercial aviation for its shifting alliances and to pursue independent and often contradictory regional agendas.
Second, my work challenges scholarship that has reproduced modernization theory's assumptions in terms of Iran's passive reception of American models. Iran Air's history reveals that Pahlavi state strategically instrumentalized aviation technology as a tool of diplomacy to achieve distinctly Iranian political objectives that often contradicted Western interests. Rather than evidence of dependency, Iran Air demonstrates the Pahlavi's attempt to position Iran as a modern, sovereign power that would compete or collaborate with global and regional rivals in air based on its interests.
Third, this research demonstrates how aviation served as a cultural site where national identity and visions of modernity converged. An examination of Iran Air's material culture, such as its emblem, advertisements, and uniforms, contributes to studies concerned with how Pahlavi Iran projected modernity and imagined national identity on a global stage during this period.
In short, by engaging in new historiographical "turns" in material culture and technological diplomacy, new interventions can be made that decenter the "West," dispute superpower narratives, and revise histories to center the periphery and globalize Cold War historiography.

Performing the Past: The (Auto)Biographical Construction of Theatre History
by Anna Dorothee Heller / Marburg University / anna.heller@uni-marburg.de
The history of theatre cannot be written without considering biographical writings and memoirs of theatre practitioners. Even the earliest works on theatre in Pahlavi Iran are predominantly biographical, as they were written by theatre professionals. Despite the question of the reliability of these works as historical sources, their subjective views have shaped our understanding of twentieth-century Iranian theatre. While later works incorporated new archival material, they nevertheless maintained the established perception by repeating prevailing narratives. Since the early 2000s, individual studies published in Iran, primarily in the form of interview collections, as well as memoirs by theatre practitioners in the diaspora, are offering new perspectives. Comparing these forms of (auto)biographical writing reveals common modes of narration based on recurring patterns of (self-)representation (see Gale and Gardner, eds., Auto/Biography and Identity, 2004). This paper shows how identifying these patterns provides insights into the artistic identities and social perception of theatre practitioners in the context of the cultural history of late Pahlavi Iran. Using the concept of the "performed embodiment," referring to the public image created by an autobiographer (see Hoogland, "What Do Theatre Autobiographies Conceal?", 2018), this paper addresses how (auto)biographies can be used as sources for writing theatre history.

Iran and Global Environmental History: Past, Present and Future Trajectories
by Mattin Biglari / University of Bristol / mattinbiglari@gmail.com
This paper focuses on Iranian environmental history, assessing the state of the field within a global context. Environmental history emerged in the US in the 1970s and became an established field of historical scholarship by the 1990s, focused on the Anglophone world. However, despite growing works in this area covering Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Middle East in the last quarter century, it is a field still dominated by studies of North America, Europe and Australasia. Indeed, the environmental history of Iran is a nascent field, despite a context of global climate crisis and acute crises within the country today. This paper discusses the opportunities of writing environmental histories of Iran, not only to address Iranian historiography, but also global environmental history. It first outlines the historical trajectory of environmental history through a comparative perspective, identifying major themes, methodological challenges, and overlapping areas with other schools of historiographical thought. It then shows how recent environmental histories of Iran have drawn on and diverged from such perspectives, especially with reference to climate, deserts, forests,

agriculture, animals, disease, infrastructure, and oil. The paper then tackles the question of whether Iranian environmental history necessarily applies concepts borrowed from Anglophone contexts or has the potential to unsettle dominant assumptions animating the global field, perhaps even the very category of 'environment' itself. It also suggests pathways for future transdisciplinary research through emerging environmental humanities subfields such as sensory studies, animal studies, and petrocultures, helping to broaden the source base of historical enquiry.

Room 1.16

25. Iran's Layered Temporality in European Women's Travel-Writing (1888-1936)

Chair: Julia Hartley, Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet

This panel explores the question of temporality in the works of three European women who travelled to Iran in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century: Jane Dieulafoy (travelled 1880s), Vita Sackville-West (travelled 1920s) and Freya Stark (travelled 1930s). These were decades of modernisation for Iran, including shifting partnerships with Western powers and a re-evaluation of the modern nation's relationship with its ancient heritage, two dimensions to which these women were well attuned. Dieulafoy was part of the first state-sponsored French archaeological mission at Susa. Nasreddin Shah Qajar had been persuaded to sign off on the mission by two arguments: forging closer ties with a European power and showing to the world the greatness of Iran's ancient heritage. Vita Sackville-West travelled to Iran to accompany her husband Harold Nicolson, who was a British diplomat in Tehran at the time of Reza Khan's coup, which marked the transition from Qajar to Pahlavi rule. While writing at a time of rapid change, Sackville-West was just as interested in the distant past, a keen observer of the antiquity (historic and geological) of Iranian landscapes. Stark, finally, set out to identify the locations of legendary figures from history: the Assassins, but on the ground she became just as interested in the everyday lives of the current inhabitants of these peripheral regions and how they had been touched by modernisation.

The proposed panel will analyse the temporal layering present in these women's writing and photography as they sought to capture their embodied experience of the present, the distant histories reconstructed through material traces, and the recent changes of modernisation. Dieulafoy, Sackville-West and Stark were outsiders to Iran, but they were also outsiders at home as women leading unconventional lives. As such, they offer unique perspectives on Iran as a changing modern state and as millennia-old region and civilisation.

The Temporality of Archaeology according to Jane Dieulafoy

by Julia Hartley / https://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/mlc/staff/juliahartley/ / julia.hartley@glasgow.ac.uk

Jane Dieulafoy's dig diary À Suse: Journal des fouilles (Hachette, 1888) describes the challenges of setting up France's first archaeological mission in Iran (1884-86) and carrying it to completion with limited funding and hostility from the local population (caused by the site's proximity to the Tomb of Daniel). À Suse is more than a record: it is a narrative intended to entertain and grip its readers, as well as shape Dieulafoy's public image as an intrepid hero putting their life at risk in service of the French nation. It equally includes personal reflections on the nature of archaeological work, in both practical and ideological terms. This paper focuses on Dieulafoy's reflections on the temporality of archaeology through two lenses.

First, the challenge to preexisting notions of cultural modernity and primitivism resulting from the Susa finds. Dieulafoy interprets Achaemenid art as evidence of the 'advancement' of the Persians and on one occasion pronounces the art of the 'moderns' inferior to that of the 'ancient masters'. Secondly, the nature of the connection between past and present that is established by the archaeologist. Dieulafoy views archaeology, through its uncovering of lost artefacts, as a literal 'resurrection' of the past. But they also acknowledge the symbolic and imaginative nature of archaeological reconstruction. In a particularly charged passage, Dieulafoy addresses the mounds of

Susa writing: 'I had identified with the past that you represent, I lived an existence made of dreams beside the Dariuses and the Xerxeses, friends who will never be unfaithful. I owe you the glory of reawakening the dead.' Both dimensions are here intertwined, as Dieulafoy claims credit for unearthing a lost civilisation while also acknowledging that the finds merely 'represent' the past and the reawakening of the dead is carried out through 'dreams' as much as physical labour and historical research.

Time and space, antiquity and modernity in Vita Sackville-West's Iran
by Lindsay Allen / King's College London / lindsay.allen@kcl.ac.uk
In Passenger to Teheran (1926) and Twelve Days in Persia (1928), Vita Sackville-West packaged her intense response to the emotional and sensory impacts of two trips to Iran. Her husband, Harold Nicolson, had in 1925 been appointed chargé d'affaires to the British legation in Tehran. They experienced the country just as notions of national revival and modernisation became particularly current in contemporary Iranian discourse, due to constitutional and economic change. This paper examines how Sackville-West narrated her experiences in order to embody what she saw as the country's chronological hybridity. Both speed and substance could represent encounters with either modernity or antiquity in her texts. She used such rhetorical formulae as a means to process the vast and unfamiliar extent of the terrain she encountered, as well as the variety of cultures and lifestyles it supported. Motorisation and oil exploitation were ambivalently identified as phenomena of the current era, while minute details of worked stone, biome and landscape contour represented rich strata of deep time. Scrutiny of this patterning allows us to explore Sackville-West's travelogues as exemplary case studies for critical mobilities and infrastructuralism.

Everyday Modernity: Freya Stark, Visual Politics, and the Edges of Empire in Iran
Michelle Clement / University of Strathclyde, Glasgow / Michelle.clement@strath.ac.uk
This paper examines how Freya Stark's *The Valleys of the Assassins* (1934) visualizes early modernisation in Iran's remote regions. Combining photography and narrative, Stark highlights subtle shifts: new or altered routes, changing village layouts, and everyday encounters with reform. Her position as a woman traveller gave her access to domestic interiors and peripheral geographies often unseen by other British observers.
Rather than foregrounding official ceremonies, Stark frames modernity as a lived and uneven process visible in routines and material landscapes. The paper argues that her travel writing enacts a visual politics of modernisation in which empire, gender, and temporality intersect. Through selective framing and narrative control, Stark offers a textured account of change that complicates imperial authority and linear notions of development.

Room 1.17

26. Language, Power, and Resistance: The Kurdish Struggle Through Translation

Chair: Farangis Ghaderi

For much for the twentieth century Kurdish language faced ban and denial across the Middle East (in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria) and was dismissed as a "local" language incapable of conveying anything beyond "local culture". As such, writing and publishing in Kurdish became an act of resistance, and translation into Kurdish served as a crucial role in linguistic, cultural, and political defiance as well as language revitalisation. Equally significant was translation of Kurdish literature into European languages, which drew attention to Kurdish cultural production and asserted its recognition in the global literary landscape, and challenged the entrenched dehumanisation of the Kurdish people.
A diverse range of actors have contributed to translating Kurdish literature into European languages as well as to translating world literature and scientific works into different varieties of Kurdish (Kurmanji, Sorani, Gorani, and Zazaki). In the absence of institutional support, translation efforts

have predominantly been carried out by individuals, largely motivated by personal commitment rather than financial gain, however the field has seen increasing specialisation, first in the diaspora and later in Kurdistan. In the early stages world literature was translated into Kurdish from Persian, Arabic, and English. The practice of translating Kurdish literature into European languages was initiated by Orientalists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but in the twentieth century it was mostly led by the Kurdish writers and intellectuals in the diaspora.
The diversity of actors and the absence of state/institutional support has resulted in inconsistent output and fragmented representation of the Kurdish literature (Ghaderi and Yucel, 2021). Despite its challenges and limitations, translation plays a vital role in the survival of 'minority' languages. It not only preserves linguistic heritage but also strengthens speakers' confidence in the value and legitimacy of their language (Zuccato 2013) and affirms their relevance in a globalised world. This panel reflects on translation as resistance against erasure and domination in the Kurdish context. It examines the opportunities of translation for Kurdish language, but also the methodological challenges Kurdish literary translators face, and the creative strategies they have adopted in addressing the limitations. These endeavours constitute cultural or political activism and are part of language revitalisation efforts.

Reading Franz Kafka in Kurdistan
by Haidar Khezri / University of Central Florida / hkhezri@ucf.edu
This presentation examines the reception and appropriation of Franz Kafka in the Kurdish-speaking world in relation to struggles for religious and ethnic freedom in a region marked by a long history of mono ethnic nationalism and Islamization. The early, mostly indirect translational endeavors of Kafka's works by Kurdish translators—Ata Nahai (Rojhelat), Ferhat Aydın and Fatih Aydın (Bakur), Jodat Hoshyar (Başûr), and Nayrouz Malik (Rojava)—are placed in dialogue with later original fictional works such as Rauf Behgard's Silāw Kafka (Hi/Dear Kafka, 2015); Jan Dost's Mamarr 'Amin (Safe Corridor, 2019); Behrouz Boochani's No Friend But the Mountains (2018); and Burhan Sönmez's Evîndarên Franz K. (Lovers of Franz K., 2024). I show how Kurdish writers viewed Kafka as "prophetic" of the Holocaust and Stalin's Gulag, linking these to Saddam Hussein's genocidal Anfal Campaign and the so-called Islamic State's genocide against Yezidis, and as an "exodus writer" applicable to varied diasporas: foremost, European Jews in the context of the Palestinian Nakba, and, by extension, to migration, displacement, and exile of the Kurds and Yezidis resulting from the 2009 Iranian Green Movement, the 2010 Arab Spring, and the 2016 Turkish coup attempt. Highlighting the translation of Kafka as an integral part of Kurdish activism, the presentation argues for a larger role played by translation—alongside prose and poetry—in spreading Kurdish national identity across the Kurdish-speaking world beyond the borders of Iran, Türkiye, Iraq, Syria, and in diaspora.
Keywords: Kafka reception, translation activism, Kurdish exile literature, national identity, cross genre appropriation.

Politics of translation from Kurdish: challenges and opportunities of translating from under-represented languages
by Kareem Abdulrahman / Freelancer / kareem.oa@gmail.com
Translating from a "minority" language such as Kurdish that is under-represented in the West, including in the Anglophone cultures, poses particular challenges, but there are some opportunities too. In this paper, which draws on my experience as a translator, I highlight challenges that are unique to Kurdish.
The Kurds have not had their own nation-states; their culture and language have often been repressed in the countries they live in, namely in Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria. As a result, the literary

infrastructure that supports the growth of a language, including translation, is either non-existent or very rudimentary.
The lack of political sovereignty has had wide-ranging consequences including poor literary echo system, which can be further divided into: Lack of resources, including authoritative dictionaries, let alone specialized ones; lack of seasoned translators and editors who can mentor the next generation of translators. This also extends to advanced courses for Kurdish literary translation, mentorship opportunities and so on. Translators and publishers in many other languages can often apply to grants through various institutions to support translation projects and promote translated works. There are also no awards to celebrate Kurdish translation and the work of translators. Another key factor is the that Kurdish studies, particularly in the West, is a nascent field which means there is insufficient scholarly studies on Kurdish literature, including its key icons and works. This is augmented by the field of Kurdish Studies being dominated by political studies and marginalisation of linguistics and literary studies.Nevertheless, translating from Kurdish also means translators can choose from a wide range of works as few books have been translated. Translators in effect also become among the first generation of experts to build a bridge between Kurdish culture and others, therefore their impact is potentially greater than peer translators from "saturated" languages.

Ulysses in Kurdish: Kawa Nemir's Kurmanji Translation of James Joyce's Novel: Linguistic strategies, Language Revitalization, Political Resistance

by Margreet Dorleijn / m.dorleijn@uva.nl

In my presentation, I will focus on the individual efforts of Kawa Nemir, a renowned Kurdish translator and poet from Turkish Kurdistan, who translated James Joyce's Ulysses into the Kurmanji dialect of Kurdish (2023). This monumental endeavor took him over twelve years, during which he faced numerous hardships that led to his exile in the Netherlands.
As the language in Ulysses comprises various genres, this poses challenges for a translator who translates it into a language (Kurmanji) that has a long history of suppression and therefore limited possibilities to develop a large diversity of registers. In my presentation I will highlight the linguistic strategies Nemir employs to overcome these challenges, and demonstrate, how, in this way he actively enriches Kurmanji.
Turkey's longstanding denial of Kurdish culture and identity, coupled with dec des of assimilation policies, has taken a significant toll on the Kurdish people. Many have lost proficiency in their native language and confidence in its beauty and potential. Consequently, Nemir's dedication to translating world literature into Kurdish transcends mere literary translation, no matter how professional. Drawing on years of research that began in childhood, when he collected Kurdish vocabulary from his mother, Nemir aims to showcase the sophistication and richness of the Kurdish language. His work challenges the entrenched dehumanization of Kurds, who are often associated primarily with military conflicts.
Nemir's efforts can be understood both as resistance against Turkey's assimilation policies and as a means of building symbolic capital to encourage Kurdish language revitalization.

Translation as Political Agency in Multicultural Contexts: Rethinking Power and Voice in Contemporary Iran

by Azad Rahim Hajiagha / Independent Scholar / joanna.bochenska@kurdishstudies.pl

Given the longstanding hegemony of the Persian language over diverse ethnic groups within the Iranian nation-state, this paper examines the origins, dynamics, and positioning of activist translator and interpreter groups engaged in revitalizing other languages, particularly Kurdish, as a form of collective action. The activism of Kurdish translators in the Iranian context is distinctive, as they leverage their linguistic skills to expand narrative spaces and empower voices rendered invisible by

the hegemonic dominance of Persian and its associated language politics. Drawing on my extensive experience as a translator from English into Sorani Kurdish in Rojhelat (Iranian Kurdistan), I explore these dynamics.
The use of the Kurdish language and the translation of socio-political texts within a Persian-dominated environment constitute a space of resistance and a means of reconfiguring symbolic capital. In the humanities, particularly in literature, the revitalization of Kurdish—through deliberately minimizing the role of Persian and continuously reshaping the linguistic hierarchy within translated texts—forms a core component of these translators' political agenda, alongside their linguistic mediation of texts and utterances. Thus, while Kurdish translators seek to revitalize their language through translation as an act of political distinction, translating Kurdish texts into Persian simultaneously serves to highlight Kurdish identity.
By analyzing the growing trajectory of Kurdish-language translation and the positioning of these professional translator groups, despite intensified censorship of knowledge production in languages other than Persian, I argue that translators, fully aware of their liminal position between Iranian and Kurdish identities, seek to assert the power of their marginalized voices within Iran's intellectual sphere through the interplay of power and knowledge.

Room 1.18

27. Critical Approaches to Sensory Histories of Iran

Chair: Laudan Nooshin | Discussant: Amir Moosavi

There has been a growing interest in recent years in the sensory dimensions of social and political life in the humanities and social sciences. Within Iranian studies, however, there has been little exploration of this, aside from the recent volume on sensory readings of Persian literature and culture (Khorrami and Moosavi, 2021). Drawing on the work of scholars such as Panagia (2009), we aim to broaden the discussion on the role of the senses in our understandings of history and how the past was experienced. The panel comprises four speakers, a Chair, and a Discussant. Speaker 1 explores how Qajar authorities used sound (such as drums and trumpets) and silence in executions. Employing local chronicles and European travelogues, they argue that sonic elements of punitive parades served as a spectacle of state violence, while silencing - through strangulation and death - was a key component of punishments. Moving on to the Pahlavi period, speaker 2 examines the role of radio and its associated listening practices in shaping shared affective experiences that contributed to the regime's nation-building imperatives, with a focus on the politics of listening during the 1953 coup and its aftermath. Speaker 3 considers the role of cinema in Abadan as a site where oil modernity's infrastructures intersected with everyday sensory life. They argue that sonic practices and auditory publics fostered through cinema-going served to shape collective memories, embedding petro-modernity in embodied and affective experience. Speaker 4 discusses how Persian-speaking poets of the pre-modern and modern periods have deployed the senses as epistemic modes of remembering, negotiating, and reimagining home and belonging.
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Embodied Verses: A Sensory Exploration of the Exilic Mode in Afghan and Iranian Exile Poetry
by Fatemeh Shams / University of Pennsylvania / fshams@upenn.edu
This paper examines the poetics of exile in the Persianate realm through a sensory examination informed by phenomenology, affect theory, and diaspora studies. Moving beyond historicized studies of exile as a political condition, I argue that Persian-speaking poets of the pre-modern and modern

periods have deployed the senses as epistemic modes of remembering, negotiating, and reimagining home and belonging. Smell, taste, and touch often emerge as sensory channels through which the lost homeland is re-embodied, while sound and vision mediate the fractures of linguistic and cultural translation. Drawing on works of exiled Iranian and Afghan poets, this essay argues that sensory poetics constitutes a transnational aesthetics of exile, or better yet, an embodied archive of displacement that resists the abstraction of exile as a mere political condition. This reading contributes to debates on exilic subjectivity, memory studies, and the politics of world literature by foregrounding the sensorial as central to diasporic literary production.

The Sounds and Silences of Qajar-era Executions

by Farzin Vejdani / Toronto Metropolitan University / farzin.vejdani@torontomu.ca

This paper explores how Qajar authorities employed sound and silence/silencing in executions of various criminals, including heretics, murderers, and sex criminals. It draws on a number of sources, including Persian local chronicles, Babi and Baha'i histories, diaries, and European travelogues. Methodologically, it draws on the works of sound studies scholars in anthropology, geography, sociology, and history and puts them into dialogue with sociological and historical theories of punishments. As Cheryl Glenn has observed, silence and silencing are central mechanisms of punishments. In nineteenth-century Iran, executions not only involved silencing in a literal sense through death but also through the use of strangulation (khafah kardan) and hanging. Punitive parades leading up to executions were sonic events in which the drum (tabl), trumpet (shaypur), and other musical instruments were deployed. What is striking about such punitive parades is that the instruments used were those associated with ceremonial music of the court and the military rather than the chamber music of private parties, with few exceptions. To illustrate this point, the paper examines the famous assassin of Nasir al-Din Shah, Mirza Riza Kermani, who was paraded around Tehran to the sound of military drums. During his execution, the royal military band performed the royal anthem (salam-e shah). His execution, which was well documented through photographs, was thus not just a visual event but also a sonic one. This paper argues that the unique Qajar sonic order accompanying punitive parades functioned as an invitation to partake in the state's spectacle of violence. Through such sounds, the state beckoned crows to learn the supposed moral lesson (dars-i 'ibrat) of execution and to consolidate the social contract between subjects and the state.

Listening Iran: Radio and the Aural Social Life of Pahlavi Iran, 1930s-1940s

by Babak Rahimi / Associate Professor of Culture, Religion, and Technology / brahimi@ucsd.edu

The launch of radio in Iran on April 24, 1940, under Reza Shah profoundly reshaped social life during a period of state-led modernization intended to transform the country into a modern nation-state. Central to this shift was the creation of ambient soundscapes in domestic and public spaces, which introduced new sensory experiences of simultaneity and presence across the nation. This study examines the social—and by extension political—impact of radio during the early stage of Pahlavi modernization in the 1930s and 1940s. It offers a historical and theoretical analysis of how radio restructured sensory perception and practices of aurality, particularly in relation to modernization projects in both urban and rural contexts. Radio was employed as a tool for education and public health campaigns, while also contributing to the rise of new mass cultural practices. The study also explores the affective regimes of radio programming that generated structures of feeling—configurations of shared emotion and experience that not only shaped the sonic fabric of modern life but also forged a sense of national belonging as a sonic collectivity. Finally, the study considers new modes of attention and distraction within domestic life and addresses the politics of listening during the 1953 coup and its later entanglement in Cold War anti-communist propaganda.

Petrosonic Modernity: Cinema, Sound, and Everyday Life in Abadan (1920s–1979)
by Armaghan Fakhraeirad / University of Pennsylvania / faar@sas.upenn.edu
This paper argues that cinema in Abadan, Iran's emblematic oil-port city, functioned as both infrastructure and sensory milieu from its colonial inception to 1979. Established under British company urbanism and mapped onto segregated spaces, cinemas initially reflected the stratifications of oil modernity. Yet as venues multiplied, they produced shared routines of looking and listening that partially unsettled boundaries of class, race, and neighborhood, offering relief and rhythm in a city of grueling labor and suffocating heat.
Foregrounding sound, I trace how cinematic practices: Foreign languages, Persian dubbing, collective whisper-translation, amplified film songs, and foyer noise, constituted new auditory publics. These sonic habits bled into Abadan's musical life, seeding local genres and repertoires; the prominence of Arabic in soundtracks fostered translocal identifications across the Gulf. Cinemas doubled as concert venues and occasional forums for debate, even as they remained instruments of propaganda first for the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and later the Pahlavi state.
Drawing on archives and oral histories, I read cinema as both a product and producer of petroleum modernity: a colonial import vernacularized in everyday use, a technology of dominance that convened pleasure, memory, and desire. Re-centering the sonic renders oil history not only geopolitical and economic, but embodied and affective.

Room 2.17

28. Iranian Politics and International Relations (20th–21st Century)

Chair: Neda Jahanbani

This panel explores factors that have contributed to Iran's political involvement and position on the international stage since the 20th century. We will be discussing topics related to Iran's foreign policy and strategy, which includes interactions with regional neighbors as well as global powers. A major aspect of Iran's contemporary political experience is the influence of external sanctions on the government and their adverse effects on the Iranian population. By analyzing developments in these areas, the panel seeks to highlight Iran's position in the global order, its place in shaping international policy, and the effects of global politics within Iran.

Mixed Messages: The United States and Iran's Framing of Sanctions During Trump's Maximum Pressure Campaign
by Neda Jahanbani / Columbia University / neda.jahanbani1@gmail.com
Between 2018 and 2020, the Trump administration's "maximum pressure" campaign used sanctions not only as an economic tool, but as symbolic acts meant to signal dominance to multiple audiences. Comparatively, the Iranian government responded by reframing these sanctions to benefit its own political agenda. These "mixed messages" regarding the purpose of sanctions policy act as a vehicle for promoting nationalist rhetoric during three especially turbulent events in both Iran and the U.S. While the literature on sanctions typically focuses on the economic effectiveness and effects of the policy (Nephew; Early; Pape) this paper looks at the multidimensional and cross-national rhetoric of sanctions and their role in communicating national unity, moral ideology, and global positioning for both countries. Using data from the official U.S. State Department's media statements and the government-run media outlet, Tasnim News, I examine three specific occurrences within this time frame: [1] U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA (2018), [2] the IRGC (Revolutionary Guard) being designated as a terrorist organization (2019), and [3] the breakout of the COVID-19 pandemic in Iran (2020). Through keyword and semantic analysis, this study demonstrates how the United States' rhetoric regarding these events was angled at boosting national security and dominance on the global stage, while Iranian media frames these same events as assaults on national sovereignty and fortification of internal legitimacy.

My paper aligns with the panel: "Iranian Politics and International Relations (20th-21st Century)" because sanctions represent a major challenge to the current regime's political strategy, impacting propaganda and messaging to constituents regarding foreign policy and the United States in particular.

Modernizing the Orient: Iran, the United States, and the Politics of Development, 1960–1979
by Reza H. Akbari / American University / ra4670a@american.edu
This working paper examines how modernization theory and Cold War–era intellectual paradigms shaped Iran's foreign policy during the 1960s and 1970s. I argue that the Shah's White Revolution—a state-led program of land reform, industrialization, and infrastructure development—was deeply intertwined with U.S. developmental discourse. Modernization theory functioned as a policy framework within Iran, but also as an analytic lens through which the United States viewed Iran and the broader Middle East. This co-dependent relationship produced several binary models, such as "tradition versus modernity" and "East versus West," that informed academic understandings and foreign policy decisions. The U.S. knowledge-production machinery, including early Middle East studies programs and government-funded research, reinforced the Shah's efforts to project Iran as a "soon-to-be modern" state, while Iran's foreign policy validated American assumptions about development and modernization in the region.
The paper situates its argument within broader scholarship on late Pahlavi-era history, Cold War development, U.S.–Iran relations, and the politics of knowledge production in area studies. It builds on the work of scholars such as Zhand Shakibi, Gholam Reza Afkhami, Timothy Mitchell, and Zachary Lockman. Its evidentiary basis includes archival policy documents, memoirs, oral histories, founding papers of Middle East studies centers, and early journal editorials.
This paper is part of a pre-organized panel titled Iranian Politics and International Relations (20th–21st Century) and aims to contribute to the discussion by showing how transnational intellectual frameworks shaped Iran's foreign policy while also influencing American academic and policy perceptions of the country. In doing so, it highlights the reciprocal dynamics between state-building, international relations, and knowledge production in shaping both national and global politics.

Sanctions and the Political Economy of Disillusionment: Iran's Student Movement in Retrospect
by Vahid Abedini / University of Oklahoma / v.abedini@gmail.com
This paper examines how U.S. economic sanctions have transformed Iran's pro-democracy student activism over the past two decades by drawing on first-hand narratives of leading activists from the 1990s and 2000s. Using a combination of publicly available materials—including interviews, memoirs, and social media posts—alongside original interviews conducted by the author, the study explores how sanctions have reshaped these activists' lives, careers, and worldviews. Once at the forefront of Iran's reformist and democratic movements that sought rapprochement with the United States, many of these activists have since experienced imprisonment, exile, or political marginalization. By elaborating on these cases, the paper argues that sanctions have accelerated the erosion of the institutional and economic foundations that once sustained Iran's student movement and civil society, leading to political withdrawal, disillusionment, and ideological shifts among former activists.
Empirically, the study traces how prolonged exposure to international pressure, economic hardship, and isolation redirected the political orientation of this generation—from early optimism about Western democracy-promotion policies to a more realist, nationalist discourse emphasizing sovereignty, security, and stability. By situating these shifts within broader debates on sanctions, authoritarian resilience, and the political economy of rentier states, the paper contributes to the

growing literature that challenges the assumption that economic sanctions empower internal opposition or promote democratization and regime change.
This paper is part of the panel "Iranian Politics and International Relations (20th–21st Century)" and complements the other contributions by exploring how international coercion shapes domestic political identities and ideological realignments in post-revolutionary Iran. Through its use of qualitative evidence and personal testimonies, it offers a rare analytical perspective on how economic warfare penetrates everyday political life, producing unintended consequences that weaken democratic forces while reinforcing authoritarian stability.

The emerging Iranian-Israeli conflict and the GCC
by Arash Azizi / Yale University / aa5856@nyu.edu
At its inception in 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran defined itself in opposition to Israel and conservative Arab states such as Saudi Arabia. That year saw a fundamental change in regional arrayment Egypt signing a peace treaty with Israel leading to its expulsion from the Arab League and Iran's new regime breaking all ties with Israel and adopting a harsh anti-Israel position. Iran was now aligned with few radical Arab states such as Libya and Syria against Saddam Hussein's Iraq and also the Arab states of the Persian Gulf which formed the Gulf Cooperation Council in 1981. But Iranian political and diplomatic attitudes toward Israel and the Arab world have gone through many shifts then. Iran's official position remains anti-Israel while it now puts emphasis on its ties with GCC and attempts to re-establish ties with Egypt. This paper presents a history of shifting factional discourses in the Islamic Republic toward Israel and the Arab world – and asks questions about their potential evolution in future.

Room 2.18

29. Resurrections of Kings and Heroes: Epic Narratives, Transmediality, and Cultural Memory Across Media

Chair: Naghmeh Esmaeilpour

Epic narratives have long inspired adaptation across literature, visual arts, performance, and new media. Their mythological, historical, and heroic dimensions offer enduring frameworks for exploring identity, values, and collective memory. Today, these narratives are increasingly reactivated through multiple media forms—from cinema and television to video games, graphic novels, and digital art—reflecting a global movement of adaptation and recontextualization.
Works such as The Shahnameh and other monumental epics worldwide animate struggles between good and evil, light and darkness, and human and supernatural forces, creating immersive "storyworlds" that invite reinterpretation across different contexts and media forms. Within transmediality studies, epic traditions provide fertile ground for multimodal expression—from theatre and film to graphic novels, interactive media, and video games--preserving core themes of love and sacrifice, loyalty and betrayal, strength and wisdom while reshaping them for new audiences.

Transmediality and Resurrections of Kings and Heroes in Video Games
by Naghmeh Esmaeilpour / Independent Scholar / naghmeh.esmaeilpour@gmail.com
When Johann Wolfgang Goethe in 1827 declared the emergence of the epoch of world literature and encouraged everyone to "hasten its approach," he could have never imagined that years later in the twentieth-first century his works would turn into video games which not only alter the literary genres but also change the medium through visualizing the fictional adventures into virtual realities. Employing literary texts as the storyworld of video games plays an important role in the process of interactions, translations and mutual exchanges between and within national and international cultures which removes the actual borders' restrictions. Taking video games as the contact zone

among cultures and nations, the significance of this proposed study is its applied innovative interdisciplinary approach by situating its readings in the intersections of world literature studies, game studies, transmedial narratology, adaptation studies and comparative studies. More importantly, its novelty centers on employing what I term gameture (as a portmanteau based on game, literature, and adventure) as the contact zone of (trans)mediality, mobility, and literary circulation (/translation). Working on Marie-Laure Rayan's 'transfictionality/transmediality' and Henry Jenkins' 'transmedia storyworld', this study explores how borrowing and representing the literary texts in multimodal video games open new doors in building cultural conceptions and realities of a nation to the rest of the world. The aim of this research is the study of how "gameture" incorporates transmedia narrativity (/storyworlds), and the intermediality of literary texts to commence interaction/connections between different cultures. To this end, video games create a shared (cultural, political, social, or even economic) narrative-world based on factual or fictional stories to present an adventure for its users around the world. As such, the suggested term gameture initiates an interdisciplinary approach to investigate how video games visualize the literary texts and change them into a virtual adventure of multimodal texts (a combination of pictures, films, texts, and the other visual effects) to present a specific meaning/reality to the players/users. The hypothesis is grounded on how world literary texts such as the Shahnameh (c. 1010) by Abolghasem Ferdowsi is represented, repositioned and turned into a coded political, social, cultural and historical narrative of video games like Garshasp: The Monster Slayer, Siyavush: Legends of Persia, to name but a few. As a result, this research demonstrates how these games encapsulate the Shahnameh in the form of transmediation or transmediality of storyworld to revive Persian national culture and history as well as to broadcast Iranian heritage and traditions to the infinite world of gaming.

Chupā Rostam: 'The Hidden Rostam' in South Asian Cultural Imagination

by Fatima Fayyaz / Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), Pakistan.
/ fatima.fayyaz@lums.edu.pk

The enduring Urdu idiom, "Tum tou baṛe chupe Rostam nikle"—which literally translates as, "You turned out to be quite a hidden Rostam"—is a compelling linguistic vestige in South Asia, signifying an unexpected display of brilliance or valor. The persistence of this phrase underscores how Rostam, the legendary champion of Ferdowsī's Shāhnāmeh, remains profoundly imprinted upon the region's cultural memory and collective subconscious. This heroic figure has transcended epochs, propagated through storytelling traditions, evolving across various artistic forms and vernacular expressions in the Indian Subcontinent.

This paper traces the transfiguration of Rostam within the South Asian aesthetic milieu from the mid twentieth century onward, focusing on three artistic adaptations of this heroic figure across varying mediums and historical junctures. The first is Rostam va Sohrāb (1962), a play by Pakistani dramatist Āghā Ḥashar Kashmīrī, which acclimates the Persian tragedy to a local emotional and cultural lexicon. The second is Rostam Sohrāb (1963), an Indian film by Vishram Bedekar, which reimagines the Persian epic hero through the unique lens of Indian cinematic culture. The final case study examines the Rostam Series (2011–12), a body of paintings by Pakistani Hazārā artist Khādim ʿAlī, where Rostam is ironically reconfigured as a demonic figure who is a slayer of Buddha rather than the vanquisher of the White Demon. This depiction invokes both the self-proclaimed heroic lineage adopted by the Taliban and their destruction of Bāmiyān's Buddha statues in 2001.

Through these critical re-imaginings, Rostam emerges not as a static Persian warrior but as a fluid, protean figure who is culturally localized, emotionally resonant, and politically charged. This study explores the dynamic ways in which Rostam's image is perpetually reanimated in the South Asian cultural imagination, embodying the complex shifting narratives of heroism, identity, and resistance.

Keywords: Rostam, Shāhnāmeh, South Asia, Urdu, heroism.

Room 2.19

30. Zoroastrianism: contacts and interchange between India and Iran

Chair: Jaime Martínez Porro

The Zoroastrian community from the end of the first millennium CE on was (still is) divided in two major groups, the Indian one (Parsi) and the Iranian. The contacts between both communities never stopped, although the socio-political situation influenced the frequency and viability of these contacts.

In this panel we want to analyze the contacts between both communities, the influences of one over the other in different levels: rituals, written transmission of the Avestan texts and other social and religious affairs.

The Persian Revāyāt: Names, Letters, and Networks

by Niloofar Homayoonzad / Universität Hamburg, Department of Asian and African Studies / niloofar.homayoonzad@studium.uni-hamburg.de

With the Islamic conquest of Iran in the 7th century CE Zoroastrians faced increasing pressures; These ranged from massive forced conversions to the imposition of poll taxes which in some cases led to migrations both within and beyond Iran. The first group of immigrants were from Khorasan, who chose India as their final destination in the 8th century and gradually established the Parsi community in India. The others became more marginalized over time and took shelter in regions like Yazd and Kerman. Since the time of immigration to India until 15th century we have very scarce information about any connection between these two communities It was only in 1478 CE, with the journey of Nariman Hušang from Broach to Yazd, that correspondence resumed in the form of the Revāyāt, a collection of letters exchanged between the Iranian and Indian Zoroastrians from the 15th to 18th centuries. These letters, rich in theological inquiry, liturgical consultation, dedications, and signatories, offer valuable insight into the transregional religious networks maintained across Iran and India.The main focus of this research would be on dedications and signatories: What can we learn from the names that are mentioned in the letters? How can we re-construct the communication between Iranian Zoroastrians and the Parsis through the names, dates and places?

Key Words: Zoroastrian, Iran, India, signatory, Persian Revāyāt

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Avestan manuscript contacts between India and Iran

by Jaime Martínez Porro / https://fu-berlin.academia.edu/JaimeMart%C3%ADnezPorro / jaimemporro@zedat.fu-berlin.de

The first Zoroastrian manuscripts in Avestan language preserved are from the 13th Century. However, most of them are from the 1600 CE on until around 1900. During this period, the contacts between both communities in Iran and India was constant. Thanks to the improvement in the last years in the field of the Avestan manuscripts, now we can trace better these contacts and how these influenced the text in both directions.

In this contribution I try to show some examples of these contacts and their relevance for the edition of Avestan texts.

The Peri (Fairy) Women's Ritual Tables: Folk Practice in Zoroastrian Communities of Iran and India

by Ramin Shahzadi / Department of Iranian Study - Freie University of Berlin / r.shahzadi@fu-berlin.de

This paper explores some of the Peri (Fairy) Women's Ritual Tables practised within Zoroastrian communities of Iran and India. Alongside the formal religious ceremonies conducted by Zoroastrian priests (Mobeds), these female-led rituals, although they are not part of the official Zoroastrian liturgy, remain deeply embedded in the collective religious imagination and cultural continuity of Zoroastrian society.

These ritual gatherings often involve offerings, storytelling, and symbolic acts dedicated to invisible benevolent beings known as Peris. They mostly serve as women's social events, reinforcing female solidarity and intergenerational transmission of cultural values. With the advance of urbanisation and modernisation, such practices have gradually declined, surviving primarily in a few rural Zoroastrian settlements in Yazd and Kerman in Iran, as well as some of the Parsi communities in India.

The research is based on some interviews by the Author and some contemporary ethnographic observations and fieldwork conducted by Mrs. Shahdokht Hirbod in Zoroastrian villages of Iran. She has also collaborated on this study as a research partner in the collection and interpretation of contemporary sources.

12:45 – 13:45

Lunch Break

13:45-15:45 Janskerkhof 2/3

Room 0.13

31. Iran Academia: An Evolving Model of University Beyond Borders – Achievements, Challenges and Future Directions (A Case Study)

Chairs: Ali Banuazizi, Touraj Atabaki

Presentations:

Ali Reza Kazemi – Managing Director, Iran Academia
Saeed Paivandi – Academic Director, Iran Academia
Sajad Sepehri – Educational Development and Innovation Strategist, Iran Academia
Alireza Behtoui – Lecturer Perspective
Reyhane Gholami – Alumni Perspective

31. Indo-Persianate Wisdom and Esoteric Zoroastrianism in Modern Iran and India

Chair: Mohamad Tavakoli, Delbar Khakzad

This panel will investigate the diverse expressions of Indo-Persianate and Zoroastrian esotericism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The papers collectively examine the novel constructions of these traditions as they encountered the new socio-cultural and epistemological realities of modernity. The first paper will examine how traditional cosmological doctrines associated with Islamic philosophy were transformed by both newly available doctrines of Western astronomy and recently revived gnostic Persian texts associated with Azar Kayvan (d.1618). Rather than adopting a wholesale positivism, the paper will argue that Indo-Persianate esotericism enabled some accommodation between older cosmological doctrines and novel scientific theories. The second paper will examine the global trajectories of ishrāqi texts as they made their way to the United States in the 19th century. As the paper will detail, Suhrawardi and the Dasatir-i Asmani found new readers

between India and America in the aftermath of the 1857 Indian Rebellion and the American Civil War. The third paper will focus on the vow of silence taken by Meher Baba (1894-1969), an Irani-Zoroastrian spiritual teacher who cultivated a substantial global following in the twentieth century. Meher Baba's silence will be examined as a doctrine stemming from both a long esoteric tradition within Sufism and Zoroastrianism pertaining to the nature of language, as well as to a modernist strategy to help articulate a new universal religion. The final paper will examine the figure of Minocher Musserwanji Pundol (1908-1975), a twentieth-century spiritual master from the Parsi community who claimed revelatory epistemologies. Focusing on Pundol's dreams, the paper argues for the importance of recognizing non-scriptural sources of esoteric knowledge for modern community-making. Collectively, the papers will draw from primary sources— including hagiographies and contemporary accounts—to argue that the Indo-Persianate and Zoroastrian traditions continued to be reshaped in creative, dynamic, and often surprising ways during the modern period.

Illuminating Modern Science: The Legacy of Azar Kayvan and Indo-Persian Wisdom in Revisiting Islamic Cosmology

by Delbar Khakzad / University of Pennsylvania. / delbar.khakzad@alumni.utoronto.ca

This presentation examines how the eroding boundaries between the two complementary dimensions of Islamic philosophy, "theoretical wisdom" (hikmat-i nazarī) and "practical wisdom" (hikmat-i ʿamalī), that had shaped classical Islamic cosmology, were reconfigured in 19th-century Iran. In this reformulation, a modern Islamic cosmology emerged in which "intellect" ('aql) and logical demonstration were preserved as an intermediary link—and as a symbol of modern intellectual endeavour—within the hierarchy of creation between the Creator and human souls. Yet attaining knowledge of the Creator was considered possible only when the intellect, purified through inner clarity, could apprehend the light of the divine. The corpus of sacred Persian texts compiled in India by the followers of Azar Kayvan (d. 1618), an Iranian gnostic émigré, played a pivotal role in this transformation. Disseminated, promoted, and read in 19th-century Iran, these works mediated the transition from a classical, outdated Islamic cosmology to a modern one infused with elements of ancient Persian wisdom and informed by modern astronomy. In this process, the outdated cosmological models in the sacred Persian texts were also replaced with concepts from modern astronomy, while simultaneously reframing these ideas as teachings rooted in Zoroastrianism. Through this dual process—modifying both Islamic and Indo-Persian sacred texts—the advancement of modern science was articulated in the language of spiritual endeavour and associated with a newly fashioned vision of Zoroastrian antiquity. This trajectory stood in contrast to the positivist theories then emerging in Europe.

Masters of the Unseen: Religious Revelation and Social Recognition of Minocher Pundol

by Mariano Errichiello / SOAS University of London / me25@soas.ac.uk

This paper explores the figure of Minocher Nusserwanji Pundol (1908–1975), a Parsi spiritual teacher revered by segments of the contemporary Parsi community, whose teachings are deeply rooted in revelatory epistemologies. It examines how Pundol and his followers, commonly referred to as Pundolites, construct claims of authenticity within the broader context of Parsi hermeneutical polyphony. Central to this analysis is the concept of the master: both as an embodied guide in Pundol himself and as a hidden, semi-divine being understood as a guardian of Iranian pre-Islamic knowledge. By tracing conceptual continuities between Pundol's teachings and strands of esoteric thought in the modern Parsi community, the paper investigates how authority is established through non-scriptural channels such as dreams and inner vision, and how these experiences are mobilised for socio-religious militancy. Particular attention is paid to the intersection of epistemology and social

dynamics, specifically how esoteric knowledge becomes a basis for intra-communal authority, religious distinction and political stance. The paper argues that Pundolism exemplifies a vernacular mode of religious knowing, one that blurs the boundaries between metaphysical insight and embodied leadership, and illuminates the adaptive force of esoteric paradigms within modern Zoroastrianism in India.

The Sound of Silence: Meher Baba's Doctrine of Language between Zoroastrianism and Universal Religion

by Afshin Marashi / University of Oklahoma / amarashi@ou.edu

This paper will examine the life and work of Meher Baba (1894-1969), an Irani-Zoroastrian spiritual teacher born in Pune, India, who developed a global following during the middle decades of the twentieth century. Among the most notable features of Meher Baba's life and work was his decision to commence a long period of silence in 1925 that continued until his death in 1969. The paper will examine the nature of Meher Baba's decision to abstain from verbal utterance during this forty-four-year period. It will use pronouncements made by Meher Baba himself to explain his silence, hagiographic accounts by devotees who observed him during this period, and descriptive accounts by others. These sources will help to argue that Meher Baba's silence drew from a long history of esoteric traditions, including traditions found in Sufism and Zoroastrianism, relating to the limits of language as a means of communicating the ineffable and universal nature of the divine. The paper will also argue that Meher Baba's silence helped to foster a personal charisma that worked to popularize his religious mission, especially as he increasingly travelled to Europe and North America from the early 1930s. Finally, the paper will also argue that his refusal to use human language can be interpreted as a gesture of resistance to the growing fetishization of ethno-linguistic and sectarian identity that was becoming increasingly normalized during the twentieth century's age of nationalism.

On Illumination and Transendence: Suhrawardi in 19th-Century America

by Daniel Sheffield / Princeton University / dansheffield@gmail.com

In October of 1886, a curious advertisement appeared in the journal Scientific American. Mirza Muhammad Hadi, "a Mussulman gentleman, resident of Lucknow India" and "Professor of Persian and Arabic philosophy" was seeking employment in America. In his early 20s, Muhammad Hadi had started a journal in Lucknow entitled Ishrāq, devoted to the study of Platonism, offering Urdu and Persian translations of Greek and Arabic texts. A year after his personal ad was placed, Muhammad Hadi began to correspond with a kindred spirit in Osceola, Missouri. Thomas Moore Johnson was the publisher of a journal known as the Platonist and sought to establish a new Platonic Academy in the American Midwest. In this talk, we explore the relationship between these two men, which led to a new English translation of the collection of Suhrawardian liturgies known as Dasatir-i Asmani being produced for an American public. Further, we explore the intersecting trajectories of the study of philosophy in the aftermath of the Indian Rebellion of 1857 and the American Civil War.

Room 0.17

32. Navigating the Margins: A Transnational Perspective on Iranian Women's Music-Making (moved to slot 19)

Chair: Hadi Milanloo

This panel examines Iranian women's access to musical spaces in Iran and the diaspora. Using ethnographic methods, it interrogates the complex interplay of familial, sociopolitical, and transnational forces that shape women's marginalization in music. Moving beyond documenting Iranian women's exclusion, it reveals the strategies they employ to navigate and challenge systems of oppression. Spanning homeland and diaspora, this panel illuminates women's diverse roles as

singers, educators, and instrumentalists across Iran's contemporary history and complex cultural landscapes.
First presentation examines women's singing pedagogy in post-revolutionary Iran through Maryam's case, a teacher navigating surveillance and regulation. Drawing on interviews and observations, it shows how state-authorized music classes paradoxically legitimize and constrain women's musical activity, exposing tensions between institutional normalization, control, and female agency within legal musical spaces.
Second presentation focuses on Iranian female singers after 1979 to ethnographically analyze how political bans intersect with family, class, and regional factors. It highlights women's adaptive strategies—private performances, digital sharing, protest participation—and shows how their voices embody resilience and defiance, sustaining cultural expression and contesting gendered boundaries in restrictive environments.
Third presentation analyzes a female musician's innovative approach to online music education during the COVID-19, arguing that the restrictive conditions of Iranian women's participation in music can generate new forms of agency. It suggests women's persistent negotiation with social/structural constraints has cultivated a capacity for flexibility, experimentation, and boundary-crossing.
Fourth presentation explores the artistic transformations of Iranian female instrumentalists after migrating to Canada. Drawing on fieldwork in Toronto and Tehran, it examines how they renegotiate professional identity and aesthetic principles, as well as forge new transnational alliances with other racialized women to reestablish their careers in a new country. This paper situates the experiences of Iranian female musicians within the broader transformations of the Iranian diaspora in North America.

Transnational Transformations: Women and Iranian Classical Music in Canada
by Hadi Milanloo / University of Toronto / hadi.milanloo@gmail.com
A growing subfield of scholarship has analyzed the condition of female musicians in Iran, with a particular focus on singers and the official ban that has prohibited them from performing solo in public since 1979 (e.g., Chehabi 2000, Mozafari 2013, Assadollahi 2023). This scholarship offers invaluable insight into the strategies that Iranian women employ to battle their exclusion. However, it overlooks the stories of female musicians who, like numerous other Iranians, have left the country in recent decades. My paper addresses this gap by concentrating on aesthetic transformations and strategic alliances among female instrumentalists of Iranian classical music who have migrated to Canada over the past 10 years. While the exclusion of Iranian women from musical spaces since 1979 has been well-documented, I ask how the nature of these women's musical participation changes within a diasporic context. Drawing on my current fieldwork in Canada and previous doctoral research in Iran, I situate these female musicians in a global context, investigating how they grapple with the marginalization of their music. As they establish their careers in new countries, they renegotiate their aesthetic principles, redefine their professional identities, or reframe their career trajectories. By examining the new transnational alliances they form with other artists, I link their struggles for equity and equality to those of other racialized women. My paper expands the scholarship that situates Iranian diaspora within the broader racial politics of North America (e.g., Maghbouleh 2017, Sadeghi 2023) and adds a new dimension to the studies that investigate the inner workings of Iranian diasporic productions and their transnational networks (e.g. Ebrahimi 2019, Hemmasi 2020, Yaghoobi 2023).

Singing Under Surveillance: Women's Music Education and Resistance in Post-Revolutionary Iran
by Sepideh Raissadat / University of Toronto / sraissadat@hotmail.com

In the aftermath of the 1979 Revolution, the Islamic Republic of Iran prohibited women from performing solo before mixed-gender audiences — a restriction that remains in force more than four decades later. According to official regulations, female voices must appear in choirs, be accompanied or "covered" by male voices, or be confined to female-only spaces. Despite these limitations, many women have continued to pursue solo singing in private domains such as singing classes, recording studios, informal gatherings, and, more recently, online platforms.

This paper examines state-authorized female singing classes between 2000 and 2023, focusing on the case of Maryam (pseudonym), a singer and teacher. Her experience reveals a tightly regulated pedagogical environment in which government oversight extends from attire and classroom discourse to the projection of women's voices. The institute where she teaches is under constant surveillance, with CCTV cameras operating as panoptic mechanisms that instill fear and uncertainty among participants.

Drawing on interviews and virtual observations of Maryam's teaching sessions (2018–2023), as well as analysis of her students' gatherings, this study explores how both teachers and students negotiate and resist state-imposed constraints. These pressures have curtailed Maryam's teaching and limited her public presence; over two decades, she has performed publicly only a handful of times, largely avoiding concert permits or digital exposure to protect her position.

Despite the government's pervasive control, my research shows that female singers adapt to these constraining yet dynamic settings, and subtly reshape the boundaries of musical expression, transforming regulated classrooms into zones of trust, resilience, and quiet resistance.

The Politics of Musical Participation: An Ethnographic Research on the situation of Female Singers in Post-Revolutionary Iran

by Yalda Yazdani / Independent Researcher / yalda.yazdani53@gmail.com

The position of female singers in Iran has been shaped by a combination of political regulation, cultural norms, family expectations, and socio-economic conditions. Following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the legal ban on solo female singing in public settings imposed significant restrictions on women's participation in music. However, these constraints interact with other influences, including family attitudes, ethnic identity, religious affiliation, education, social class, and regional differences, all of which affect access to musical training, performance opportunities, and audiences. This research draws on ethnographic fieldwork, including interviews, participant observation, and documentation of performance practices, to examine how female singers navigate these interrelated challenges. It identifies a range of strategies women employ to sustain their musical engagement: performing in private or women-only gatherings, embedding singing within socially approved events, sharing music through digital platforms, and participating in underground or cross-border collaborations. The research also addresses the involvement of female singers in recent protest movements, particularly those associated with the slogan "Woman–Life–Freedom." In these movements, music has served as both a medium of personal expression and an act of political resistance. By considering the interaction between legal prohibitions, social structures, and individual agency, this research demonstrates the resilience and adaptability of Iranian women who continue to sing despite multiple layers of restriction. It highlights how their voices challenge established boundaries, contributing to broader discussions on gender, cultural expression, and artistic resistance in post-revolutionary Iran.

Creating from the Margin: A Feminist Reading of Limitation and Possibility in Iranian Music

by Solmaz Shakerifard / Seattle University / solmus@uw.edu

In this paper I examine a virtual roundtable discussion on Music Pedagogy during the COVID-19 Era, held via Instagram Live in Tehran on June 16, 2021, featuring three Iranian musicians and

educators—two men and one woman. While the male participants emphasized the limitations and losses brought about by the shift to online teaching, the female musician described her transition to virtual pedagogy as seamless and even productive since she had already incorporated virtual lessons into her practice long before COVID due to her students' issues with mobility and access. Her experience invites a reconsideration of the relationship between marginality, resilience, and creativity within Iran's musical landscape.

Drawing on Saba Mahmood's notion of agency (2005), I suggest that the very constraints Iranian female musicians encounter can themselves generate creativity and open new possibilities. The female (or otherwise marginalized) musician's ability to 'improvise' within structural and social limitations reflects a form of agency that is grounded in adaptability and persistence rather than overt opposition. Following Sara Ahmed (2017), I propose that such "feminist willfulness" has cultivated a capacity for flexibility, experimentation, and boundary-crossing that unsettles rigid and dominant aesthetic readings of Iranian classical music.

By analyzing this roundtable discussion through a feminist lens, I reframe Iranian female musicians as creative agents who continuously reimagine participation, authorship, and presence. Their practices reveal an understanding of music-making that resists patriarchal definitions of authority and tradition, proposing instead a radical vision of inclusion–one that insists on having a seat at the table not as token participants but as legitimate and transformative contributors.

Room 0.19

33. Creative, Tenacious Lion Women of Iran (SHIR ZANAN-E IRAN)

Chair: Mary Elaine Hegland

Some brave, intrepid women of Iran have been brought to the world's attention. This panel aims to add to that trend by foregrounding less well-known women of Iran. Our papers will demonstrate the courage, thoughtfulness, and steadfastness in the face of discouragements of some women from various Iranian backgrounds. Although outsiders may assume Iranian women to be obedient to their male family members and religious/political authorities, we find women thinking for themselves, making their own decisions, bringing about change, and supporting each other in their struggles against challenges, patriarchal oppression, and attempts to make them follow cultural and religious ideals of others.

One paper covers the history of gender power relations in Kurdish music performances, looking not only female musicians but also male ones who have had crucial influences on the formation of new gender meanings and ideologies in Kurdish culture. Another paper introduces both more "ordinary" and elite Baluch women and how they deal with their burdens and try to better their own lives and those of their daughters. A paper focuses on both women's organization in diaspora and their connections and relations to movements in Iran. Some activist women from 1979 stayed in Iran and tried to find ways to work to bring about change without leaving the country. Another paper traces the history of a group of political activist women who call themselves "Zanan" and have met in northern California for 30 years to further educate themselves, broaden their perspectives, enjoy open discussion, and support each other through political, social, and personal challenges as they work for justice and equality.

We wish to give honor, recognition, and credit to women of Iran as yet unknown to the world. Some of the women of Iran here discussed have risen to high levels of education and attainment. Even less educated and advantaged women, we note, accomplish much in finding their own ways and supporting those around them while facing great challenges and barriers--with the help of other women.

Gender Dynamics in Traditional and Cross-Border Kurdish Music

by Parang Farazmand / Ph.D. in Ethnomusicology / parang.farazmand@musikwiss.uni-halle.de

This paper presents an interdisciplinary and ethnomusicological analysis of Kurdish music, focusing on how gender is represented in traditional and cross-border Kurdish musical scenes, where diverse Kurdish musical activities are performed. It examines how gendered codes in Kurdish musical performance have been performed and challenged in both traditional and cross-border contexts, and how these challenges have led to transformations, fostering new gender meanings and sparking Kurdish feminism within the Kurdish diaspora in Sweden through music. To meet the study's goals, a variety of theories from different fields are utilized. Besides ethnomusicology, perspectives from anthropology, gender studies, diaspora studies, and performance studies are integrated to explore the intersections of gender, power, music, and identity within Kurdish traditional and diasporic settings. The research is primarily grounded in several key theories: the concept of gender performativity by Judith Butler, Judith Halberstam's theory of female masculinity, which highlights that masculinity is not limited to male bodies, Henry Spiller's theory of masculinity in music, which frames masculinity as a matter of power, the concept of disidentification by José Esteban Muñoz, which describes it as "recycling and rethinking encoded meaning," and Josh Kun's audiotopia, which portrays a space where music allows minoritized groups to envision new futures.

From Safe Space to Stronger Together: The Story of an Iranian Women's Activist Network

by Jamileh Davoudi / "Zanan Group in Northern California" and "Collective Action of Independent Iranian Women Organization" / jamilehpeace@yahoo.com

This paper explores the journey of a group of Iranian women political activists who, despite their diverse social, cultural, and political backgrounds, came together to build a community centered on women's issues. Initially formed as a safe space for dialogue, sharing stories, and mutual support, the group has over the course of three decades evolved into a resilient collective that continues to thrive against the backdrop of political, social, and personal challenges. In monthly meetings, we have created an environment for open discussion and broadening perspectives on a wide range of topics—from art, literature, and history to business, psychology, and social change. The paper reflects on the obstacles we faced—including internal differences—while also emphasizing the lessons learned, the achievements gained. Today, thirty years after its inception, this network of women not only endures but also works with renewed strength and vision supporting the movements for justice and equality.

The Subtle Struggles of Ordinary Baluch Women

by Azadeh Kian / Emeritus distinguished Professor of Sociology / azadeh.kian@u-paris.fr

Until the past few years, what was considered our knowledge of Iranian women and their activities was largely limited to the urban educated middle classes, often Persian and from Shi'ite origins. The experiences and activisms of non-Persian Sunnite women and other subaltern women had been largely excluded from feminist knowledge production. The subtle struggle of 'ordinary' women was not recognized and taken seriously mainly because strategies they deployed and their repertoire of action were very different from the ones mobilized by women's rights activists in large towns. For example, they did not tend to show their discontent publicly, even less by demonstrating in the streets, or making the veil a major issue.

However, crucial changes have occurred in the lives of these women as a result of social transformations, including transformations of gender and ethnic relations. In Baluchistan that holds the record for absolute poverty and in Golestan, the other poor province, many ordinary women have played a crucial role in the process of family and social change, and the weakening of the patriarchal family.

Through a number of examples from my field works in Baluchistan and Golestan provinces, I show how the courageous ordinary Baluch women tried to change things from within their families,

targeting the so-called traditions that prevented their daughters to continue education after primary school and struggled against early marriages. In addition to these women often from lower class origins and less educated, the educated middle class women in Baluchistan became role models for the young women of their communities. These young women from various religions and ethnicities, have all constructed multiple identities, and try to realize the reinvention of the self in the context of concrete constraints from which they contest power relations through bargaining with patriarchy which also embodies the power of the state.
The "Women, Life, Freedom" movement, clearly illustrated that the marginalized, discriminated and subordinate groups, belonging to ethnic and religious minorities, who were previously excluded, emerged or gained, through their struggles, the means to speak on their own behalf and challenged the dominant discourses and actions.

From Village Circles to Digital Streets: Translocal Iranian Feminism in the Vernacular
by Janet Bauer / Trinity College / janet.bauer@trincoll.edu
The emergence of Woman, Life, Freedom may have surprised global audiences, but no one who has lived or worked with Iranian women can doubt the force of women's networks—kin, friends, and neighbors—who have long provided solidarity and mutual care, whether protecting victims of domestic violence in a village or quietly organizing feminist libraries in the city. Yet scholarship on Iranian feminism has often privileged elite or representative figures (such as Mahsa Amini) and formal organizations or post-hoc movement labels (like Woman, Life, Freedom), overlooking the everyday, relational forms of agency that sustain women's activism.
This paper reconceptualizes the Iranian women's movement through the lenses of vernacular and emergent feminisms, drawing on Osanloo's insights into the power of interpersonal networks in rights advocacy and Bayat's work on nonmovements. It foregrounds mobilities and translocality as generative frameworks for understanding how orientations to feminism and gender activism have historically taken shape across social, geographic, and digital spaces.
Drawing on historiography and decades of ethnographic research—from internal urban–rural circulation to diasporic networks—this paper examines how mobilities and translocal engagements, both physical and digital, have constituted Iranian women's movements. It highlights the range of women's actions, from informal village circles to transnational exchanges, emphasizing the often-overlooked contributions of provincial and working-class women—such as the Azeri woman who challenged her landlord, the first Pahlavi-era woman political prisoner, and Cobra, whose diasporic exchanges with cousins in Iran reveal how feminist orientations circulate through everyday ties.
By situating these cases within long-standing practices of sociality and mobility, the paper contributes to Feminist, Middle Eastern, and Iranian Studies by showing how translocality constitutes the connective tissue through which gender activism emerges at the intersection of the vernacular and the global--repositioning women's nonmovements as lived, enduring forms of resistance.

Room 0.21

34. Roundtable: Iranian Masculinities Across Time - Part I
Chair: John W.I. Lee, Janet Afary

This is Part I of a two-part round table that will offer a deep historical perspective on the evolution of Iranian masculinities across time. In this round table, the chair will begin with a brief introduction to masculinities in ancient Iran from the Achaemenid to Sasanian periods. The introduction will be followed by four papers which examine: 1. Iranian and Persianate masculinities in Classical Persian Literature; 2. the intersection between religious masculinity and same-six desire in the hajj travelogues of the Qajar period; 3. the dramatic challenge to the patriarchal foundations of Iranian

masculinity in the late Qajar and Early Pahlavi era; 4. masculinity and the male body in Iranian modern art of the Pahlavi era.

Lineage and Hegemonic Masculinity: Procreation and Dynastic Legitimacy in Sasanian Iran
Haleh Emrani

The Gender-benders of Samak-e ʿAyyār: Cross-dressing, Female Masculinity, and Transgender Capacity in a Premodern Persian Prose Romance
by Alexandra Hoffmann / University of British Columbia / alexandra.hoffmann@ubc.ca
This contribution examines the literary figure of the ʿayyār – or "noble-minded bandit" in this case – in a twelfth-century prose romance. The ʿayyār (as opposed to the pahlavān, or "warrior") is an expert trickster, a master of ruse and disguise who frequently bends gender in cross-dressing episodes. While ʿayyāri is a predominantly male space, the importance of trickery makes ʿayyāri more available to women to perform than other kinds of masculinities. But what should we call the performance of ʿayyāri when it is dissociated from male bodies? In speaking to this question I examine the case of a female ʿayyār who surpasses many of her male peers in her performance of female masculinity, as well as a case of an ʿayyār living as a man until an accidental outing in terms of this figure's potential transgender capacity. By reading ʿayyāri as a masculinity distinct from other premodern Persianate masculinities, and by attending to its availability across genders, we can begin to recover a more nuanced picture of premodern masculinities of the Persianate world. The paper thus contributes to the general aim of the roundtable – a deep history of Iranian and Persianate masculinities – by highlighting a literary form of ʿayyār masculinity in the twelfth century.

Patriarchal Masculinity, Iranian Fatherhood, and the Challenge of Modern Education
by Sivan Balslev / Hebrew University of Jerusalem / sivan.balslev@mail.huji.ac.il
This paper examines the transformation of Iranian masculinity through the neglected lens of age-based patriarchal hierarchies, arguing that age was as central to masculine identity as gender relations. Drawing on autobiographical accounts, travel narratives, newspaper articles and sociological studies, the analysis traces how modern education challenged traditional patriarchal masculinity while revealing its remarkable capacity for adaptation.
The study demonstrates that masculine identity in Iran was fundamentally grounded in patriarchal authority over women and children. Traditionally, Iranian fathers performed masculinity through emotional distance, arbitrary control, and the ability to prioritize personal desires over children's needs—with patriarchal dominance serving as an important validation of masculine standing in society. However, the expansion of modern schooling starting from the late 19th century created unprecedented challenges to this identity by establishing alternative authority structures, inverting traditional knowledge hierarchies, and removing children from direct surveillance by adult family members, neighbors, and acquaintances.
Challenges to paternal authority were experienced as direct assaults on masculine identity. Rather than eliminating patriarchal masculinity, these challenges forced Iranian fathers to develop new strategies for performing authority and control. The evidence reveals a shift from domination through fear, violence, and distance toward control through emotional engagement, negotiated decision-making, and surveillance. This represents a modernization of patriarchal masculinity rather than its abandonment.
The analysis reveals that the fundamental principle underlying gerontocratic patriarchal masculinity—the capacity to control children's obedience —persisted throughout these transformations, enacted through evolving methods of controlling children's time, space, and bodies.

Negotiating Patriarchy, Performing Masculinity: Reconstructing Male Body and Identity in the Art of Khosrow Hassanzādeh and Fereydoun Ave

by Delaram Hosseinioun / PhD Candidate Utrecht University / delaram.hosseinioun@gmail.com

This article explores the intricate interplay of the male body, gendered identity, and idealized masculinity in the art of Khosrow Hassanzādeh (1963–2023) and Fereydoun Ave (b. 1945). Ave, a pioneering artist and prominent art collector, educated in the US, based in Tehran, has played an influential role in the transformation of Iranian modern art, challenging gender norms. Representing the contemporary generation, Hassanzādeh, who grew up amid the revolution and the Iran-Iraq War, faced traumatic experiences as a young soldier and portrays the contradictions affecting masculinity in his generation. Focusing on Ave and Hassanzādeh's depictions of Rostam, the mythical archetype hero in Persian literature, and Gholamrezā Takhti (1930-1968), an iconic Iranian champion wrestler, the essay explores the views of these two artists toward idealized masculinity, epitomized in the virtues of pahlavānhood and Javānmardi. Drawing upon Chehabi's scholarship on Iranian masculinity in the context of the Zurkhaneh (a traditional athletic setting), the article first explores Hassanzādeh's works as an act of resistance against hegemonic patriarchal discourses. Additionally, the article surveys how Hassanzādeh creates a counter-narrative to the idealized masculine hero and highlights vulnerability as a neglected virtue. Ave, on the other hand, captures the decline of the idealized hero, navigating tensions between traditional/patriarchal values in Iranian culture and modernity. Touching upon the LGBT symbolism in Ave's works, the essay further illustrates how Iranian masculine identity has been caught in the flux of burdensome ideals and thwarted socio-cultural transition. The essay analyses the creative means by which the two artists negotiate, subvert, and rearticulate the complexities of gender, power and identity dynamics over generations.

Room 0.22

35. Mapping the Imaginary of the Iranian World in Spain: Space, Borders, and Ethnicities

Chair: Farshad Zahedi, Fernando Camacho Padilla

This panel seeks to explore how the Iranian world has been imagined, represented, and reconfigured within the Spanish context, with particular attention to spatial, cultural, and ethnic dimensions. By invoking the notion of the "imaginary," we aim to analyse not only historical encounters and scholarly discourses but also the symbolic geographies that shape perceptions of this region and its diverse communities. The concept of mapping is understood here both literally and metaphorically: as the tracing of physical and conceptual borders, and as the articulation of identities in relation to space.

The following three analytical axes will be given particular emphasis. Firstly, the spatial dimension considers how Iran and its cultural spheres are situated within Spanish academic, political and cultural narratives. Secondly, the dynamics of borders, conceived as sites of contact, negotiation and exclusion, that define the boundaries of the Iranian world in Iberian imaginaries. Thirdly, the role of ethnicities is highlighted, with a focus on how ethnic groups – both real and represented – mediate understanding of Iranian diversity in Spain.

The panel includes interdisciplinary perspectives, bridging history, social sciences, film studies and cultural studies, and political thought, to illuminate the intersections between the Iranian world, Spain, and the broader debates on space, identity, and representation.

Ethnic and Religious Minorities from the Iranian World in Spain: Making Perceptions and Visibility Count

by Fernando Camacho Padilla / Universidad Autónoma de Madrid / fernando.camacho@uam.es

This paper explores how ethnic and religious minorities from the Iranian world (Iran, Afghanistan and Iraqi Kurdistan) are perceived and represented in Spain, examining how these communities negotiate visibility and participation in public life. The term 'the Iranian world', when considered in its broad

cultural and linguistic sense, encompasses a variety of groups that have different ethnic, linguistic and religious identities. Despite their growing presence and contributions to the multicultural fabric of Spanish society, these groups remain relatively underexplored in both academic and public debates in Spain. Through a combination of media analysis and a review of existing literature, this study investigates the ways in which stereotypes, social attitudes and institutional frameworks shape the lived experiences of these minorities. Particular focus is given to issues of religious pluralism, cultural recognition and civic engagement, as well as the tensions between invisibility and marginalization, and the demand for greater social acknowledgement. The findings suggest that, while Iranian minorities are often portrayed in a reductive manner — particularly in relation to Islam and Middle Eastern geopolitics — they also generate new forms of cultural visibility and civic commitment. Ultimately, the paper calls for a more nuanced understanding of these communities, challenging homogenizing discourses and highlighting the social debate in connection to Spain's plural society. This paper is part of the panel “Mapping the Imaginary of the Iranian World in Spain: Space, Borders, and Ethnicities”.

Visualizing Borders on the Spanish Screen: Human and Political Frontiers in Ghobadi’s Turtles Can Fly (2005)

by Farshad Zahedi / Universidad Carlos III de Madrid / fzahedi@hum.uc3m.es

Television coverage of Kurdish women’s resistance against ISIS between 2014 and 2019 brought Kurdistan to the attention of the Spanish public. Yet audiovisual engagement between Spain and Kurdistan had begun years earlier through cinema. A prominent example is Bahman Ghobadi’s Turtles Can Fly (Lakposht-ha ham parvaz mikonand, 2005), which premiered in Spain and constitutes a pioneering visual encounter with the Kurdish-Iranian borderscape. The film depicts the condition of border-crossers through a survival drama, functioning both as a war story and a visual study of human and political boundaries, illustrating how cinema renders liminal spaces as lived and aesthetic experiences.

Set in a borderland, the narrative follows marginalized children navigating violence, precarity, and neglect. Ghobadi’s poetic vision offers an alternative to dominant accounts of political frontiers, emphasizing resilience, solidarity, and everyday creativity. Drawing on the border aesthetics framework of Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), Chiara Brambilla (2015), Schimanski and Wolfe (2007; 2017), and Hamid Naficy’s accented cinema (2001), this study examines how the film portrays borders both narratively and visually. It asks: How are borders narrated and visualized in this work? How was the film received by Spanish audiences? And how might these representations shape understandings of human mobility across transborder spaces?

The methodology combines visual content analysis with an examination of Spanish critical and scholarly reception, identifying interpretive patterns and debates generated by Ghobadi’s film. This approach demonstrates that border studies in film and visual narratives not only analyze representations of borders but also reveal how these representations generate imaginaries, challenge dominant discourses, and engage with issues of violence, hybrid identities, and social marginalization. Ultimately, the paper contributes to its panel by foregrounding the role of cinematic images in the construction of imaginaries of the Iranian world, particularly with regard to the depiction of borderscapes and border-crossers through the lens of ethnicity.

Iraqi Kurds, the Curse of Borders in Middle East

by Yashmina María Shawki-Aziz Gómez / University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain / yashmina.shawki@gmail.com

The United Nations charter establishes in its article 1 that its first purpose is “to maintain international peace and security…” and that to pursuit such members will act according to a certain

number of principles defined in article 2, in particular its point 4 states that “All members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations” .
But the question is how are borders between states established? Are borders safeguards of state integrity or do they constrain rightful rights of populations that have been forced into political boundaries? According to article 1 of the Montevideo Convention of 1933, “the state as a person of international law should possess the following qualifications: (a) a permanent population; (b) a defined territory; and (d) capacity to enter relations with other states” .
Kurds constitute the largest population in the world without a recognised state. In modern times its historical tribe configuration and the mountainous landscape of its traditional territory as well as the rivalry of the Ottoman and Persian empires for its land control have hindered the recognition of a Kurdish state after the First World War. But is its unique situation the reason for the lack of international recognition or is it the result of a historical curse that goes beyond its borders?

Imaginary of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in Spain in the 21st Century
by Darya Monastyrskaya / Universidad Autonoma de Madrid / darya.monastyrskaya@gmail.com
This paper analyses the imaginary reflection of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq as it is constructed in Spain, with particular attention to the intertwined notions of frontier and ethnic and cultural identity, through the lens of paradiplomacy.
The study situates Spain as a space where the Kurdistan Region of Iraq has projected its presence in 21st century, intensified especially since 2010 through a range of paradiplomatic instruments: political relations, cultural events, inter-university agreements, Erasmus+ mobility, academic and economic cooperation. Drawing on qualitative evidence—including scientific works and books, media representations, policy documents, and academic exchanges—this paper examines how “Kurdistan” is imagined in Spain as both a cultural homeland and a political frontier and identity.
The argument advanced is that these initiatives contribute to embedding the Kurdistan Region of Iraq within the broader imaginary of the Iranian world in Spain, but framed through Kurdish ethnicity and the symbolism of contested borders. In this process, “Kurdistan” emerges in Spanish discourse not merely as a geographical space, but as a frontier between states, identities, and narratives: a borderland that embodies both statelessness and aspirations for recognition. This last interferes deeply into the paradiplomatic relations and has side effects on its success.
By engaging with literature on paradiplomacy, border studies, and ethnic representation, the paper highlights how cultural and academic diplomacy become key tools for the Kurdistan to inscribe its territorial narrative in Spain’s intellectual, academic and cultural landscape. Also, the role of the KRG Spain office, the timeline of the development of this “Kurdistan region” perception in Spain will be analysed and described as well as the role of the Kurdish community in this imaginary perception. This analysis contributes to the panel’s broader aim by showing how imaginaries of space, frontier, and ethnicity intersect in shaping Spanish perceptions of the Iranian world, revealing paradiplomacy as a practice of symbolic cartography.

Room 1.09

36. The Iranian diaspora: Intersections, Dialogues, and Perspectives from Spain

Chair: Sheida Besozzi

With the objective of contributing to Global Iranian diaspora scholarship, this panel focuses on the case study of Iranian migration to Spain and the intersections, dialogues and perspectives that originate from the cultural connections between the two countries. As part of the research project Crossed Views between the Iranian and Hispanic Worlds: Stories and Representations in

Contemporary Times [REF: PID2023-150274OA-I00], financed by the Spanish Ministry of Education, Innovation and Universities, this panel discusses the production of culture in the public and private spheres, as a tool of resistance and belonging by Iranians in the diaspora space (Brah, 1996) in Spain. While Iranian migration to Spain dates back to the early 1970s, the two countries have been engaging in political, diplomatic and cultural terms over four centuries. Madrid is the epicentre of Iranian migration to Spain, with 3.783 Iranians living there, out of the national total of 12.534 (Spanish National Institute of Statistics, 2023). With the aim of contributing to the decentralisation of Iranian diaspora scholarship, the three papers that constitute this panel, bring to the fore more marginalised experiences of Iranian migration from a multidisciplinary perspective. In this regard, this panel bridges scholarly fields such as EthnoMusicology, Cultural Studies, Gender and Feminist Studies, Trauma Studies, International Relations and Iranian Diaspora Studies. The first paper centres on the work of Iranian artist Farnaz Ohadi in relation to displacement and the construction of memory in the diaspora and contends that music, and more particularly flamenco, acts as a transformer of trauma into creative resistance for the Iranian diaspora in Spain. The second paper delves into the construction of belonging in the Iranian diaspora in Spain, through the analysis of Kargadan, a Madrid-based Iranian diaspora journal and flamenco performance. Finally, a third paper adopts an intersectional perspective to examine the human rights activism of first-generation Iranian women in Spain, by discussing it through the different dimensions of resistance. All in all, this panel thus brings to the fore more nuanced accounts of Iranian migration and exile from a Southern-European country, contributing to the widening of Iranian Diaspora scholarship through the cultural and political connections between the Iranian and Hispanic worlds.

“Persian Sevillanas”: Music as an Archive of Iranian Transgenerational Diasporic Trauma in Spain
by Leila Marandi Lopez / University of Salamanca / leilamarandi@usal.es
In the study of diasporic cultural production from the Middle East to Western societies, music emerges as a crucial tool for communities to reshape traumatic experiences of displacement, identity, and memory. As the field of Ethnomusicology contends, “music does something for human psychology and social life” and serves as a vehicle for groups “to communicate feelings, beliefs and their very existence to another group” (Rice 24-27). In the cultural records of Iranian diaspora, music potentially transforms lived experience into a “communicative memory capable of transmitting collective identity beyond the bounds of temporal or geographic continuity” (Assmann 130). Within this framework, the music of Iranian artist Farnaz Ohadi (whose album Breath (2025) fuses Persian classical motifs with Andalusian flamenco traditions) functions as a musical archive through which stories of displacement, exile and transgenerational trauma can be both expressed and preserved. By situating Breath within Spain’s cultural geography, this study explores how Ohadi’s work established a dialogue between Iranian and Spanish cross-cultural exchanges, while sharing the legacy of trauma in Iranian diasporic communities as “institutionalized archival memory” (Hirsch 43). Ohadi’s work, thus, evokes Marianne Hirsch’s concept of postmemory, through which “the generation after bears the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before” (Hirsch 2).
Drawing from Trauma Studies, Ethnomusicology, and Hirsch’s Postmemory theory, this paper argues that Ohadi’s music performs the dual work of resurfacing and preserving: it calls attention to the pain of displacement and stores the history and legacy of Iranian suffering, migration, and tradition in a Western context. This work positions Breath as proof of music’s potential for documenting and transmitting diasporic memory, positioning itself as a sonic archive that transcends linguistic, cultural and national borders. Ultimately, the analysis of Ohadi’s work exemplifies how music, as both performance and chronicle, allows the Iranian diaspora in Spain to transform traumatic histories into creative resistance.

Iranian Diaspora Non-Activism: an intersectional reading of human rights activism from Spain
by Sheida Besozzi / Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea (University of the Basque Country, EHU, Spain) / sheida.besozzi@ehu.eus
This paper explores the tensions and complexities inherent in advocating for human rights from within the diaspora, specifically in relation to the country of origin. Through an in-depth engagement with the lived experiences of first-generation Iranian women human rights activists residing in Spain, in the form of oral and written texts, it offers an intersectional lens on transnational political mobilization within diasporic contexts. Socio-political events in the country of origin provoke the resistance practices of diasporans to shift from latency and hidden spaces to more visible and collective actions in the country of settlement. In this sense, the female subjects of this study have sustained diverse forms of resistance over the years—both within public and private spheres, and through collective, individual, organized, unorganized, hidden, and dispersed modes of activism. By examining practices such as public protest, petitioning, manifesting, and digital engagement alongside everyday and more mundane acts of solidarity and resistance, this study situates diaspora politics within the liminal spaces of these women's lives. Drawing on Asef Bayat's concepts of the "non-movement" and "the power of presence"—the former concerning social movements in Iran and the latter addressing Iranian women's agency—and the work of transnational feminist Iranian diaspora scholars such as Manijeh Moradian, this paper argues for a more nuanced, intersectional understanding of resistance and power within transnational feminist diaspora politics. The paper relies on semi-structured in depth-interviews to Iranians in Madrid conducted between 2019 and 2024, as well as Spanish newspaper articles dedicated to the portrayal of Iranian women in Spain.

From Page to Stage: Iranian Cultural Production and Diasporic Belonging in Spain
by Parisa Delshad / University of Salamanca / delshad.parisa@gmail.com
This paper examines how the Iranian diaspora in Spain produces and circulates cultural work across textual and performative domains. It analyzes contributions to Kargadan, a Madrid-based diaspora journal, alongside the adaptation of flamenco by Iranian musicians, dancers, and singers in Spain and across transnational circuits. The study follows two complementary sites of practice: (1) migrant storytelling published in Kargadan, where "home" is written as a flexible, evolving construct shaped by displacement; and (2) staged flamenco practices in which expressive choices, including repertoire, gesture, dress, staging, and occasional code-switching, reframe tradition in new social settings. A combination of theoretical frameworks from diaspora and mobility studies (Hall; Clifford; Brah) with a concise semiotic lens from ethnomusicology (Turino 1999; 2008) supports close readings of how meanings travel through texts and performances. The article argues that transnational mobility and digital platforms enable Iranian migrants in Spain to build collaborative publics, link Madrid to wider networks, and extend flamenco and diasporic periodicals beyond national frames. Together, Kargadan and flamenco practices show how belonging is reimagined through ongoing, situated acts of making.

Room 1.10

37. Transfer of Knowledge in Indo-Persian Sources I

Chair: Alberto Tiburcio

Indo-Persian sources constitute a rich corpus which can often be thought of as a bridge between the Islamicate and Indic cultural spheres. Many of them derive from (or incorporate) translations or reformulations of works in Arabic or Sanskrit. This is the first of a two-panel cycle intended to explore how different cultural and linguistic elements have come together in the composition of the Indo-Persian archive throughout the medieval and early modern periods. The case studies hereby explored, demonstrate how knowledge from places like Mamluk Syria, Seljuk-ruled Iran, as well as

from classical Islamic and Indian traditions were translated, compiled, and/or reinterpreted in different Indo-Islamic court cultures. To account for the wide scope of the dissemination of knowledge transmission, we have chosen to provide examples from different regions, namely Gujarat, Bijapur in the western Deccan, and Hyderabad in the eastern Deccan, covering a time range expanding from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries. The texts examined by the panel contributors correspond to different major genres of knowledge assembly, namely the biographical dictionary (tazkira), the anthology or florilegium (jung), and a what could be classified as an encyclopedia of occult sciences, astrology, and zoological knowledge. The papers will focus on the ways in which these texts engaged with the original sources from which they drew, adapting them to the cultural and even political needs of the cultural contexts of their target audiences.

Reading Shiʿi Akhlaq in the Deccan: The Translation of the Makārim al-akhlāq in the Jung-i Quṭub-Shāhī

by Alberto Tiburcio / Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich / altiburcio@yahoo.com

It is well known that texts of ethics (akhlāq) played an essential role in the intellectual curriculum of Persianate elites in Mughal India. Less well studied, however, is the reception of this kind of literature among the Mughals' southern neighbors, the Deccan Sultanates. Within the Shiʿi Quṭub-Shāhī Sultanate of Golconda, a text titled Makārim al-akhlāq by Al-Ḥasan b. al-Faẓl al-Ṭabarsī (d. 6th C/12th C) circulated widely and was the object of various translations and inclusions in anthologies.

This paper will focus on the translation/version of the abovementioned text, which appears in the Jung-i Quṭub-Shāhī, an anthology dedicated to the Sultan ʿAbdullāh Quṭub Shāh (r. 1626-1672). The paper will situate this translation, both within the context of other translations of Shiʿi texts in Quṭub-Shāhī Golconda, as well as within the broader history of the reception of akhlāq literature in Persianate India. The paper will interrogate the extent to which the translation of the Makārim al-akhlāq can be considered a project of Shiʿi self-fashioning by the court, and as a Shiʿi substitute for the non-sectarian Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī, which was so commonly used in the Mughal north.

The Nujūm al-ʿulūm: translation and compilation in an encyclopedia from the Deccan

by Eva Orthmann / Georg-August University Göttingen / eva.orthmann@uni-goettingen.de

The Nujum al-ʻulum is an encyclopedic text compiled during the ʻAdil Shāhī period, probably by ʻAlī ʻĀdil Shāh (r. 1557–79) or a member of his court. This text is a remarkable example of knowledge transfer, as it brings together information from multiple sources, merging Indian, Arabic-Islamic and other traditions into a single comprehensive work. It seems that the ruler wanted to assemble the best available knowledge in the Deccan within one single book.

The encyclopedia was intended to comprise 53 chapters, but only six have been discovered to date, and we may doubt if the book has ever been completed. Major parts of what remains are dedicated to cosmology, astronomy, astrology and the invocation of spiritual beings. The amalgamation of different sources can very well be observed in the sections on astronomy. The part on the fixed stars follows in the tradition of Ptolemy and the Almagest, with the corresponding illustrations resembling those found in aṣ-Ṣūfī's Ṣuwar al-kawākib. However, the description of the zodiacal signs also integrates elements of Indian astronomy. This is followed by a subchapter on the planetary orbits, the length of the year and other astronomical calculations which was translated from a South Indian astronomical treatise.

The lecture will briefly describe the Nujūm al-ʿulūm and its background, and will then analyze its compilation, with a specific emphasis on the combination of Islamic and Indic lore. A focal point of the presentation will be the astronomical and astrological parts of the encyclopedia.

Reading Ibn Khallikān's Wafayāt al-Aʿyān in Persian: Translation Practices in Late Fifteenth-Century Western India

by Philip Bockholt / Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Münster, Germany / philip.bockholt@uni-muenster.de

Ibn Khallikān's biographical dictionary, Wafayāt al-Aʿyān wa-Anbāʾ Abnāʾ al-Zamān ("Obituaries of Celebrities and News about Contemporaries"), penned in Mamluk Cairo and Damascus during the latter half of the thirteenth century, encompasses biographies of approximately 850 individuals, spanning from the advent of Islam to the author's own period. The enduring reverence for this work across various Islamic regions is evidenced by its frequent citations in subsequent texts and the considerable number of extant manuscripts. Further attesting to its significance, Wafayāt al-Aʿyān, originally composed in Arabic, was later translated into Persian and Ottoman Turkish. The presentation focuses on the earliest of two known pre-modern Persian translations, Manẓar al-Insān fī Tarjamat Wafayāt al-Aʿyān, executed by Yūsuf b. Aḥmad al-Shujāʿ al-Sanjarī (or al-Sijzī) for the Sultan of Gujarat, Maḥmūd Shāh Begaṙhā (or Begṙā), in 895/1490. By situating this translation within the broader context of translation endeavours at the Gujarat court – such as Abū Bakr b. Muhammad Bharojī's rendition of Ibn al-Jazarī's prayer book, al-Ḥiṣn al-Ḥaṣīn, known as Fatḥ-i Mubīn – the presentation examines the motivations and methodologies of Yūsuf b. Aḥmad's translation project. An examination of the preface, structure, and selected entries of the Persian version of Ibn Khallikān's text will be undertaken to elucidate these questions. In addition, the study focuses on the extant manuscript corpus, comprised of seven manuscripts, five of which have been accessible for consultation. This analysis will explore the manuscript production, circulation, and readership patterns in subsequent periods. By examining these facets, the presentation aims to illuminate the intellectual and socio-cultural milieu of pre-modern Islamic Gujarat and the mechanisms of knowledge transmission through translations from the Islamic west to the Islamic east.

Room 1.11

38. The Transnational Fabric of the Iranian Revolution: Micro-Historical Perspectives

Chair: Kamila Akhmedjanova, Ashkan Hashemipour

Despite the wealth of scholarship on the Iranian Revolution, its historiography has remained overwhelmingly national in scope, tracing causes and consequences within Iran's borders while overlooking the transnational itineraries through which revolutionary actors, ideas, and institutions were forged. This panel will explore the transnational fabric of the Iranian Revolution by examining the individual trajectories of an array of its participants across borders – including revolutionary clerics, armed guerrilla groups, Tudeh Party members, and leading activists who went on to staff the (post-)revolutionary state bureaucracy. The papers emphasize how the transnational circulation of individuals, ideas, and ways of doing, shaped the revolutionary movement, in contact with networks of foreign actors, whether clerics, political parties, student movements, or armed organizations, leading to 1979. In this way, the papers show the transnational foundations of the emerging revolutionary elite, of the new state's bureaucratic and religious institutions, but also of key opposition groups, which, ironically, were embedded in similar pre-1979 international networks. Micro-historical, sociological, and longitudinal approaches will thereby enable the reintegration of revolutionary and early postrevolutionary dynamics into late pre-revolutionary developments.

The four papers also share a common methodological endeavor, seeking to revalorize the use of a diversity of first-hand empirical material to research revolutionary Iran. They will particularly rely on biographical memoirs, oral history sources, archival material, as well as interviews, media analyses, and manually-compiled sociological datasets built by combining various primary sources. When put together, these sources not only reveal the transnational roots of different actors' politicization and radicalization, but also how interconnected networks built largely on contingencies coalesced and

mobilized by 1979, capturing what Sohrabi (2018) refers to as the "muddled, fractured, and messy feel" of the Iranian Revolution.

Revolutionaries without Borders: A Transnational History of the Iranian Guerrilla Movement (1963-1979)

by Ashkan Hashemipour / University of Oxford / ashkan.hashemipour@ames.ox.ac.uk

This study investigates how various Iranian guerrilla groups built and maintained transnational networks throughout the Middle East in the lead-up to the 1979 Revolution. These include both the principal guerrilla groups – the Organization of Iranian People's Fadai Guerrillas and the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran – and smaller formations based abroad, such as the Liberation Movement of Iran-Abroad, the National Front-Middle East Branch, and the Revolutionary Organization of the Tudeh Party. These groups sent dozens of activists across the region, including to Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Oman, and Egypt, as well as further afield to countries such as Cuba and China. This study, thus, explores two questions: firstly, how these groups established relationships with global armed organisations and governments, and, secondly, how these relationships shaped activists' individual trajectories and, consequently, influenced the broader guerrilla and revolutionary movements.

This paper first argues that Iranian guerrilla groups' relations with international actors were largely contingent in nature, emerging from chance encounters or the personal decisions of rank-and-file activists rather than through organisational design or intent. Secondly, a focus on activists' lived experiences across borders reveals the impactful nature of these relationships, as they enabled groups to formalise their organisational structure and operationalise previously abstract revolutionary theory; prompted porousness and collaboration between Iranian guerrilla activists across political divides; and, importantly, created emotionally powerful bonds between individual Iranian activists and their foreign allies, which both facilitated the exchange of material support and led Iranians to participate in various regional conflicts alongside their Arab counterparts.

Given its focus on individual trajectories and actors' lived experiences abroad, this study relies on a wide range of sources, including memoirs, oral histories, and archival sources, such as organisational pamphlets and publications.

The Transnational Foundations of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Bureaucracy

by Guillaume Beaud / University of Oxford, Department of Politics and International Relations (DPIR) / guillaume.beaud@sciencespo.fr

The paper provides a comparative study of the transnational foundations of the socialization and political formation of two successive generations of Iranian civil servants, who staffed senior bureaucratic positions in the late pre-revolutionary period (1953-1979) and who joined the bureaucracy during the Iranian revolution and in its immediate aftermath (1979-1989). Recent research has emphasized the role of transnational social movements in domestic activism (Tarrow 2005) on revolutionary processes (see e.g., Perea 2021). However, works have been missing on the transnational roots of the Iranian revolutionary movement, even though most leading Iranian revolutionaries who will form its postrevolutionary political, bureaucratic, and clerical elite had been embedded in a transnational space where they were socialized to specific political ideas and figures. While the Iranian revolution has eventually involved the purge of its former bureaucratic elite (Beaud 2023), recent scholarship has pointed to the international and cosmopolitan capitals held by moderate revolutionaries appointed by the interim government (February – November 1979) (Beaud 2025), as well as by a core sub-group of revolutionary Islamist bureaucrats who joined dominant bureaucratic positions in the early 1980s (Beaud and Khosravi 2024). However, these works have not investigated the role that political socialization abroad – particularly, in university activism – played in

the making of a new generation of Iranian (post)revolutionary bureaucrats, from ideological thoughts, social bonds, and competence building. Transnational patterns of socialization indeed differed sharply from that of the previous generation of Iranian civil servants, whose socialization abroad also played a significant role in their ability to access bureaucratic positions in Iran in the late pre-revolutionary period. This article uses biographical memoirs (khāterāt) of Iranian provincial governor (ostāndār) and ambassador (safir) in late pre-revolutionary (N = 7) and early (post)revolutionary eras (N = 10), combined to two original sociological-prosopographic datasets on governors (N = 315) and diplomats (N = 280) in the postrevolutionary era.

Between Boroujerdi and Khomeini: Institutional Developments and Revolutionary Formation in the Qom Seminary, 1961–1979

by Abid Zaidi / DPhil Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Oxford
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How did the Qom seminary, Iran's foremost centre of Shi'i clerical education, transform within two decades into an engine of revolutionary imagination and organisation for the clerics (and more broadly, clerical groups) participating in the 1979 Revolution? Prevailing accounts often privilege Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's charisma within these assessments. Such readings overlook a key question: how did the Islamists around Khomeini coordinate and institutionalise his authority? This project identifies the Qom seminary as the central institution underpinning that process. It traces its evolution from the death of its last formal leader, Grand Ayatollah Hossein Boroujerdi, in 1961 to the eve of the revolution in February 1979, analysing institutional developments in leadership, pedagogy, and associational life. It preliminarily argues that reforms introduced for seemingly apolitical purposes – administrative decentralisation, pedagogical diversification, and the burgeoning of student associational life – unintentionally made the seminary a more politically capacious and mobilisational space. By the late 1970s, these developments allowed Qom to act as a coordinating hub for revolutionary clerical mobilisation, particularly after key protest movements in 1975 and 1978. The project aims to situate these institutional changes within a translocal Shi'i context. The relocation of supreme clerical authority to Najaf in 1961, the activism of Iraqi clerics such as Ayatollah Baqir al-Sadr, and Khomeini's own exile there, created new circuits of clerical mobility and ideological exchange between Najaf and Qom. Released from the burdens of global Shi'i leadership, Qom became more institutionally experimental – developing schools with hybrid Islamic-Western curricula and fostering forums of open debate. These institutional innovations, coupled with transnational linkages to Najaf, generated the infrastructure that would later channel revolutionary energies into coordinated action.

Given its focus in reconstructing an institutional narrative, this paper draws on a wide array of primary material, including interviews, private collections, memoirs, oral histories, SAVAK documents, and newspapers.

The Tudeh Party in 1970s Britain: Comrades from Afar

by Rowena Abdul Razak / School of Oriental & African Studies, University of London.
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At the height of the tensions between Margaret Thatcher's government and the trade unions, the Iranian Marxist Tudeh Party came out to support and align their own causes with the British working class. After the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran in 1979, the Tudeh faced repression in the country and received support from outside, partly provided by some party members based in London. A strong sense of solidarity emerged between the British and Iranian communist movements, and despite traditional tensions between trade unionism and communism, the Tudeh was able to create a platform of solidarity for Iran among the British trade union movement. This

ability to build this relationship originated from the Tudeh's activism leading to the revolution. This paper will look at the Tudeh Party's networks and political activities in 1970s Britain as a way to appreciate how it was able to establish itself outside of the eastern bloc, where many Tudeh members were based in the aftermath of their expulsion from Muhammad Reza Shah's Iran. This is built on an existing article of mine that looks at Tudeh activism in the 1980s and shifts focus on the party in the years before 1979. The paper will explore the party's ties to the Iranian student community in London. Active in the anti-shah movement, I will focus on University of London students and their relationship with the Tudeh, using materials from the Senate House archives. Through this, we will get a better understanding of the party's ability in network building with students, Iranian and others, in Britain, and how this platform contributed to the activism in the lead up to the 1979 revolution.

Room 1.15

39. Circulation of Knowledge in Persian between Anatolia and China

Chair: Iskandar Ding, Aslisho Qurboniev

The panel approaches the relationship between the form and content in the rise of literary and scientific Persian from the thirteenth century onwards. The genres of prose that flourished in the thirteenth-century Persian included not only history and hagiography but also theology and philosophy, scientific treatises, and didactic literature. This period is notable for the wide diffusion of Persian as a vehicle for knowledge, transcending its earlier confines and rivalling Arabic in many scholarly domains. Persian adopted a growing number of Arabic loan-words, so that by the 13th century, almost 50% of the vocabulary was of Arabic origin and among educated people, a bilingual use of Arabic and Persian became common. Hence, this panel focuses on the circulation and adaptation of knowledge in Persian from Anatolia to China. The papers will analyse the evolution and adaptation of Persian to wide-ranging content, taking into account the role of the authors, patrons, targeted audiences, and aesthetics, employing manuscript analysis, as well as close reading and distant reading methods.

One paper is concerned with the original writings and translations into Persian produced by the supporters of the Fatimid daʿwa and their Nizārī successors. Surveying a longer trajectory of Persian Ismailism, the paper focuses on the survival of works created under the patronage of the Nizārī rulers. The second paper looks at Persian as a language of scholarship for philosophical and religious sciences after the arrival of the Mongols and its subsequent reception in the post-Mongol Persianate world through Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī's philosophical encyclopedia Durrat al-Tāj. The third paper zooms in on 'Alī Akbar Khatāyī's adaptation of Persian poetry to the prose narration of China in his Khatāynāmeh, or Book of China. Poetry, it is argued, functions to enhance the religious and ethical dimensions of the narrative and its readability.

Figures of Speech in the Khatāynāmeh

by Ruinong Yin / University of California, Davis / rnyin@ucdavis.edu

Composed in the sixteenth century in Persian, 'Ali Akbar Khatā'i's Khatāynāmeh is regarded as a significant source about Ming China in the Islamic world. By employing the format of travelogue and drawing from previous geographical books and chronicles, particularly the Ilkhanid and Timurid sources, Khatā'i provides an updated, detailed portrayal of early modern Chinese society through the illustration of its political and commercial life. In Khatāynāmeh, Khatā'i showcases not merely the informational nature of the book, but also its entertaining facet. While Khatā'i's language is relatively simple and repetitive, his observations and narrations on China, when describing the new and the unfamiliar to readers, are accompanied by the sentiments of "'ajīb" and "gharīb". Moreover, Khatā'i cites verses from Persian mystical poetry and composes verses by himself, intertwining them within his prose narration of China. These poems, which carry didactical significance, enable the author to

explain and interpret his observations through an Islamic lens. Khatā'i's usage of poetry further enhances the ethical dimension and religious concern of the book, and the literariness of Khatāynāmeh makes its narrative accessible to a broader audience, that the book is for those who are fond of the information and stories about China, as well as readers who seek to unveil the deeper meaning beneath a dazzling array of portrayals of the foreign land. This paper therefore focuses on the figures of speech in Khatāynāmeh, an important feature that has not been fully examined. Through delving into the narrative devices of Khatāynāmeh, this paper aims to demonstrate how Khatā'i facilitates the accessibility of the work and his engagement with the discussion of dīn and dowlat in the sixteenth century.

Persian Texts from Alamut: Reconsidering Narratives of Loss and Evidence of Survival

by Aslisho Qurboniev / Institute of Ismaili Studies / aqurboniev@iis.ac.uk

The production of knowledge by the Nizārī Ismailis in Iran, and the survival of texts after the Nizārī polity in the Caspian region established by Ḥasan-e Ṣabbāḥ in 1090 CE was overrun by the Mongols in 1256 CE, is usually restricted to materials with explicit doctrinal content. The apparent dearth of these materials is then attributed to the destruction of Ismaili libraries, most importantly the one allegedly overseen by the Ilkhanid official and historian ʿAtā Malik Juvaynī. More evidence, however, has come to light in recent years that undermines this claim. This paper proposes to reconsider the narrative established by Juvaynī in light of recent scholarship and new manuscript evidence. The evidence suggests that materials from the Nizari state were brought into wider circulation and were adapted in different forms. Some of these were transmitted in scientific writings and found their way into mainstream without preserving an obvious trace, yet some were preserved by Tusi and his students, such as Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shirāzī, with minor reduction. By examining how books and ideas thought to be suspect were adapted in various forms, the paper aims to make a contribution to the understanding of knowledge preservation in the Ilkhanid Iran with a focus on the Ismailis. The Alamut period of the Nizarī Ismailis represents the peak of Arabic-Persian translation activities that served the aim of the Ismaili daʿwa, on the one hand, and contributed to the broader pattern of translating and popularising knowledge in the Persian language, on the other. The findings of the paper also dispel several other myths about the Nizaris, such as their deliberate isolation from and lack of interest in the outside world, and their lack of interest in historiography.

Persianizing Encyclopedic Knowledge: Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī's Durrat al-Tāj's from the Ilkhanate to the Persianate World

by Carina Dreyer / Harvard University / cdreyer@fas.harvard.edu

The Mongol rule over Iran, Azerbaijan, Iraq, and Anatolia—known as the Ilkhanate (1260–1335)—brought about profound transformations within Iranian society, significantly impacting the intellectual, religious, and cultural landscapes of the Eastern Islamic world. In this context, Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī emerged as a preeminent polymath of the late 13th and early 14th centuries. Although it has been argued that most sections of his Durrat al-Tāj —except perhaps some parts in the logic section—were translations from other, predominantly Arabic sources, the Durrat al-Tāj is still considered one of his most influential works, particularly known for its "enumeration of sciences." Further, by making a range of knowledge available in Persian, it also furthered the growing number of "Persian scientific vocabulary."

While philosophical encyclopedias of the time typically comprised logic, natural philosophy, metaphysics [and mathematical sciences], the Durrat al-Tāj is distinguished by its extended fātiḥa [which also incorporates Ibn Sīnā's taqāsīm al-ḥikma] and its inclusion of principles of religion (uṣūl-i dīn), branches of religion (furūʿ-i dīn), practical philosophy, and Sufi practice in the khātima. Until

now, the sections on uṣūl-i dīn and furūʿ-i dīn have not been edited, possibly because they, are also by modern editors, not perceived as belonging to a philosophical encyclopedia.
By analysing how this work—one of the growing number of Persian philosophical encyclopedias from its era—was accessed and utilised in subsequent centuries, the paper aims to shed new light on the evolving role and perception of Persian philosophical encyclopedia in the post-Mongol Persianate world.

Room 1.16

40. The Many Faces of Kaveh: Power, Myth and Resistance Across Borders

Chair: Alyssa Gabbay

Over the centuries the mythical story of Kaveh the Blacksmith and his revolt against the evil king Zahhak has been reworked multiple times—sometimes dramatically—to reflect the preoccupations of different peoples and ages. This panel explores the many faces of Kaveh as he appears in modern storytelling, national narratives, women's movements, and film in Iran and its neighbors. The first paper shows how, due to his lowly occupation, Kaveh was initially cast as an incompetent leader in story books written by naqqāls, or storytellers, in Iran in the late 19th to early 20th centuries—a sign of their association of leadership with elevated social status. The second paper analyzes how the figure of Kaveh became a malleable resource redeployed in the forging of new political narratives of legitimacy, identity, resistance, and mobilization in Iran, Kurdistan and Tajikistan. The third paper traces how the myth of Kaveh was appropriated by Kurdish and Iranian's women's movements, including the Woman, Life, Freedom movement, becoming a shared and transhistorical source of imagination for resistance across borders. Finally, the fourth paper continues the theme of Kaveh in Kurdistan by depicting how the 2015 film, Curse of Mesopotamia, recast the myth as a contemporary horror story about a young man's attraction to the Islamic State. Altogether, these papers offer proof positive of the lasting resonance and power of the myth of the blacksmith, no matter in what guise he may appear.

Kaveh and Kurdish Horror

by Edith Szanto / Associate Professor, The University of Alabama / edith.szanto@gmail.com

"Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." This could be the motto of the Kurdish film, 'Curse of Mesopotamia' (2015). Set in Iraqi Kurdistan, the film is both an interpretation and an adaptation of the Kurdish myth of Kaveh and King Azdahaq. What is unique about this film's retelling of the story is that it is told as a horror story. According to Hayden White, history can be told as romance, comedy, tragedy, and as satire. This film adds horror to the list.
When 'Curse of Mesopotamia' first came out in cinemas across Iraqi Kurdistan in 2015, the film was read as a Kurdish take on current affairs. At the time, the Islamic State inside the borders of Syria and Iraq, including Iraqi Kurdistan was continuing to spread and commit atrocities. With the bloody capture of Mosul in 2014, the Islamic State and its claim to religious authority became central to the popular debate.
The film speaks to the current situation through one of the characters, Ahmad. Initially, Ahmad intends to join the Islamic State and become a fighter, because it would count as a worthy sacrifice to a God who punishes sin with nightmares. What unites all the characters in the film is a shared nightmare. Regarding Ahmad, the audience soon realizes that his Islamism is just an expression of anger stemming from deep seated fear, trauma, and guilt for past deeds, past service to maleficent forces ruling Mesopotamia.
'Curse of Mesopotamia' overlays ancient Mesopotamia (identified with Kurdistan) onto our ordinary contemporary globalized world and thereby universalizes the Kurdish foundational myth, drawing attention to the underlying problem with civilization. This underlying problem is that governance, the bedrock of civilization, is necessarily a curse, a story of horror.

Who Empowers Kaveh? The Popular Reception of Kaveh the Blacksmith in Naqqāli

by Kumiko Yamamoto / Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and AFrica (ILCAA), Tokyo University of Foreign Studies / kumiko_yamamoto@aa.tufs.ac.jp

The reign of Zahhāk in the Shāhnāma is filled with archaic and mysterious characters and events. Zahhāk, for example, has a nightmare in which he is bound in a mountain by a noble prince; Faridun saves himself by magic when his jealous brothers try to kill him; or he is prevented by an angel (Sorush) from beheading Zahhāk. These episodes have been rationalized or modernized by naqqāls (storytellers) in the naqqāli (storytelling) tradition. Thus, Zahhāk's nightmare is replaced by astrologers' predictions; Faridun's mysterious brothers are dropped from the narrative altogether; and the angel's intervention is transformed into Zahhāk's apologia in court. He makes the case that the land flourished under his rule; he did not covet other people's property; and he ruled the country by following the class system. His pleas are successful as people prefer him to Faridun.

Such a strikingly conservative and pragmatic interpretation of the reign of Zahhāk by naqqāls culminates in Kaveh's characterization as an incompetent leader. In one recension of the story people attempt to kill Kaveh who cannot locate Faridun for many days. They do not understand why Kaveh is their leader, being only a blacksmith, just like them. They are apparently joined by the storyteller and his audience who equally question Kaveh's leadership, which must, according to their logic, be supported by mythic, religious or even economic agents. Only then can they accept Kaveh as their leader. This clearly shows that they have adapted the text of the Shāhnāma to their own purposes. Based on three different tumārs (story books written by naqqāls in the late 19th to early 20th centuries), this presentation will explore the popular reception of Kaveh the blacksmith in contradiction to Firdawsi's account.

Reforging myth: The After-lives of Kāveh the Blacksmith in Iranian, Kurdish, and Tajik nationalisms

by D Gershon Lewental / Ben-Gurion University of the Negev / lewental@bgu.ac.il

Across the Persianate world, the figure of Kāveh the Blacksmith continues to command mythic resonance as a malleable resource redeployed in the forging of new narratives of legitimacy, identity, resistance, and mobilisation. Secular Iranian nationalists since the Constitutional era have elevated Kāveh as an authentic pre-Islamic hero, a counter-symbol to Arab-Islamic and Turco-Islamic sovereignties and, after 1979, a rallying sign against the Islamic Republic. Here, Kāveh and his banner mark claims to antiquity, sovereignty, and civilisational pride, and feature prominently in protest iconography and diaspora pageantry. By contrast, Kurdish narratives present Kāveh (or Kawê) as an insurgent revolutionary who inspires endurance and legitimates collective action. Soviet-era leftists recast Kāveh the Blacksmith as a labour hero rallying against tyranny, while more recent activists have reconfigured the myth in gendered terms to present female militants and activists as modern-day embodiments of Kāveh's bravery. Menawhile, in Tajikistan, Kāveh (or Kova) likewise served as a model of proletarian heroïsm during the Soviet period, but today is appropriated mainly within performative and propagandistic registers that stress a secular, Persianate lineage. This non-mobilisational framing sacralises continuity and authority while eliding regional entanglements with Iran, turning myth into superficial heritage-making. Mapping the circulation of various Kāveh after-lives shows how a single legend can underwrite rival modernities—protest, statecraft, and cultural revival—without a fixed form or meaning. The case illustrates how mythic figures acquire political traction when their wide cultural familiarity invites continual 'reforging' to meet the demands of the present.

Zhan Zhian Azadi: The Revival of an Ancient Myth

by Sara Molaie / University of Toronto / sara.molaie@mail.utoronto.ca

The slogan “Woman Life Freedom” or “Zhan Zhian Azadi” comes from Kurdish women’s movement affiliated with Kurdish Worker Party (PKK) in late twentieth century. While demanding an independent Kurdistan, the party met the revival of an ancient myth, Kawa, the Blacksmith. This paper explores how the figure of Kawa has been reinterpreted in contemporary Kurdish and merged with Iranian women’s movements.

Beginning with Kurdish Women’s freedom movement in response to the internal (Kurdish) patriarchy in post 1980’s, I discuss how the revival of Kawa, served as a fundamental narrative for the liberation of Kurdish women. Yet over time, this mythic framework shifted toward the revival of a Mesopotamian goddess, Ishtar, and - by turning from Kawa to Ishtar - Kurdish women shifted the locus of mythic authority from the masculine to the feminine, thereby situating themselves not only as inheritors of cultural memory but also as active agents in the rebirth of their nation and securing more independence for Kurdistan from its surrounding powers.

I will then situate these mythic revivals in relation to the Woman, Life, Freedom movement in Iran in 2022. The movement that arose after the death of Mahsa (Jina) Amini – a 22-year-old girl from Kurdistan province, Iran- by the (religious) morality police of Iranian government, “for allegedly not wearing the hijab in accordance with government standards” is unprecedented as women’s bodies and voices became central to their struggle for emancipation. The shared legend between Kurdish and Iranian women’s freedom movements underscores how myth serves as a transnational source of imagination for resistance. In addition, the revival of the Persian myth (Kawa) does not necessarily function as a nostalgic return to the past but rather it creates a transformative space in which women destabilize patriarchal narratives and norms while opening a path to a just future.

Room 1.17

41. “Citizens of the World”: Modern Kurdish Literature Between Different Languages, Genres and Countries

Chair: Joanna Bocheńska

Throughout the 20th century, modern Kurdish literature has been an active site of resistance, playing a formative role in Kurdish political, social, and cultural struggles. It emerged following the transformation of Kurdish classical poetry at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. The first Kurdish short story was published in 1913, and the first novel in 1927. Due to decades of bans, and persecution in all four Middle Eastern countries (Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria), Kurdish-language publishing struggled to flourish until the 1990s and the early 21st century, when political oppression eased slightly. During this period, Kurdish literature experienced fragile but steady growth, accompanied by academic research especially in the diaspora. The first studies gave priority to the Kurdish novel while linking it with the Kurdish nationalism and the idea of “imagined communities”. This approach led publishers and critics to view Kurdish novels as symbols of patriotism and of high social status, as humorously depicted in Hesenê Metê’s story, Êş/Pain. However, despite being neglected in scholarship poetry remained the most popular and highly politicised genre.

In this panel we use the term “citizen of the world” to emphasise the Kurdish difficult experience of statelessness but also – following Kwame Anthony Appiah’s notion of cosmopolitanism – to point to an ability to discover new localities and become rooted in their cultures for the benefit of Kurdish literature. Kurdish literary scholarship has witnessed exponential growth over the past two decades. It transformed from a highly politicised field dominated by reductionists generalisations into a specialised domain offering more nuanced analysis. Additionally, over time, greater attention has been directed toward aesthetic forms and experimentations. The development of modern Kurdish literature has been enriched by drawing inspiration from an increasing number of sources, including multilingualism, Kurdish oral and classical heritage, translations of world literature, literary research, theatre, cinema, media, and social network. Reflecting on these developments, in this panel we focus on Kurdish literature written in different parts of Kurdistan and in the diaspora and explore

various literary genres and their dynamic coexistence, which were reimagined and revitalized through modern technologies. We reflect on gendered erasures in Kurdish literary historiography and the scholarship and emerging studies on women's contributions to the development of literature. While political struggle and Kurdish identity remain central to literary content, today Kurdish writers are also driven by their desire to connect with the outside world.

Enacting Kurdish Poetry in Kurdish Cinema: Arjen Arî's Poems and Bilal Korkut's Film Bîraxane as Examples of Interrelated Heritage-Making

by Joanna Bochenska / Jagiellonian University / joanna.bochenska@kurdishstudies.pl

Arjen Arî (1956–2012) was a renowned contemporary Kurdish poet from Bakur (Turkish Kurdistan). Over time, particularly after his death, Arî became a legendary figure, embodying an intimate and powerful poetic voice of resistance during the darkest periods of violence. His poems were memorized and transformed into songs. In his recent film Bîraxane (The Hole in the Wall, 2024), director Bilal Korkut incorporates Arî's poetry into the dialogues of a group of friends who gather to drink beer in a rundown bar somewhere in Kurdistan, discussing their fragile and often hopeless daily lives. While some critics view the film as unsuccessful, depicting only the interior of a grimy bar with awkward performances, it serves as a self-aware cinematographic and poetic tribute to Arî's work. The dilapidated setting, close-up shots of the characters, their intimate worlds, and the language they use to express themselves form the core of the film's message. Additionally, the film's screenplay was published as a book, transforming it into a literary work meant to be contemplated through reading. In my presentation, I will focus on selected aspects of Arî's poetry that are revitalized through the screenplay and filmmaking process, which, following Alex Pillen's Endurance: Speaking Kurdish in a Warped World (2024), can be described as "engines" of the vitality of Kurdish language and culture.

From Love Quest to World Map: Literary Cartography in Bakhtiar Ali's Mansion of the Sad Birds

by Ebrahim Barzegar / Jagiellonian University / ebrahim.barzegar@doctoral.uj.edu.pl

Following the Spatial Turn in the humanities, the intersection between narrative and cartography has emerged as a vital area of critical inquiry. Literature, across its diverse forms and genres, engages in acts of mapping—both explicit and implicit—through its representations of space, movement, and belonging. Drawing on theory of literary cartography, this paper explores how the folkloric love quest in Bakhtiar Ali's Mansion of the Sad Birds functions as a literary act of spatial representation. Adapted the legend of Shouran Flower, the novel reimagines Kurdistan at the center of a world, while the journeys of three Kurdish suitors to three parts of the globe in search of one hundred exotic birds, constitute a cartography of world-making. Through this reading, the text reveals how Bakhtiar Ali uses elements of folklore story, embedded with collective cultural memory and local geography, to bring back Kurds and Kurdistan to the map of the world.

A Kurdish Poetics of Witnessing Catastrophe with Sultan Yaray, Choman Hardi, and Ronya Othmann

by Hevin Karakurt / Stanford University / karakurt@stanford.edu

Kurdish cultural production is often thought to reflect and comment extra-textual reality in themes of oppression, rebellion, despair, and catastrophe. These themes are thought of both as Kurdish art's raison d'être and its content. Aiming to complicate these notions, I trace a Kurdish poetics of violence, drawing on three specific configurations of violence – the Anfal chemical weapons campaign of 1988/89, the Yazidi genocide at the hands of the Islamic State in 2014, and the recurrent state violence of the Turkish Republic against its own Kurdish citizens – in the poetry of three contemporary Kurdish poets, Sultan Yaray, Choman Hardi, and Ronya Othmann, writing in Kurmanji,

English, and German, respectively.
Reflecting on how language choice influences the respective contents and references to extra-textual violence, I will trace three formations of a Kurdish poetics of violence: one of alternative historiography, one of the documentary, and one of the scar/scarred. I hope to advance our understanding of what Kurdish literary studies as a field might look like bridging different languages, and of poetry's place in times of highly contested realms of reality.Aiming to complicate any 'natural' relationship of Kurdish literature to suffering, I will ground my analyses in theoretical considerations on the relationship between poetry with history, drawing on notions of testimony (Derrida), historiography (Benjamin, White, Ricœur), docufiction, and Kurdish cultural practices such as Dengbêj.
This contribution connects to the focus of the panel "Citizens of the World" by drawing attention to the multilingual Kurdish condition. Paying attention to linguistic singularities as well as poetic treatment of history of all three poets exemplifies how literature relates to the outside world. It also illuminates the breath and "world"-character--born out of necessity--, which has become an integral part of Kurdish cultural production.

"Erased from the margins": Reclaiming Kurdish Women's Place in the Canon
by Farangis Ghaderi / University of Exeter / f.ghaderi@exeter.ac.uk
Ruxoş Elî who interviewed over hundred Kurdish women political activists in Bashur/Iraqi Kurdistan concluded her research by stating: "women are not just marginalized; they are also erased from the margins." The omission and marginalization of women in Kurdish history is extended to cultural histories. In literary history, Kurdish women's contribution to the development of Kurdish literature has been discussed as a recent phenomenon, noticeable only from the last decades of the twentieth century. This narrative has been reproduced and reinforced in literary anthologies, translation, and academic research. Although uncovering new manuscripts, including women's works, over the last decade has to some extent challenged the assumption of the "absence" of women in Kurdish cultural production, it has not instigated serious re-evaluation of the canon. The exclusion of women's intellectual and creative writing in history is a global phenomenon, however in this paper I argue that for Kurdish women as well as patriarchy a complex web of exclusion including statelessness, political, and linguistic suppression, Kurdish political and linguistic fragmentation, and the power relation between Kurdish dialects and marginalization of smaller dialect groups have compounded their dominated status. Drawing on my fieldwork and scoping public and private archives, I discuss strategies to uncover lost women's voices. I demonstrate that re-examining primary source materials such as early Kurdish periodicals and publications provide valuable information on Kurdish women's literary production and can even recover forgotten women's voices. I also illustrate private archives and oral history offer unique possibilities to revive women lost intellectual creations.

Room 1.18

42. Learning Across Borders: Activism, Family, and Knowledge in the Iranian Diaspora

Chair: Shirin Vossoughi

Pedagogies of Political Life: Leftist Families and Intergenerational Learning in the Iranian Diaspora
Mona Hajnaghizadeh, Shirin Vossoughi, and Mahdi Ganjavi

Ordinary Women and Dominant Diasporic Narratives: Voices from the Zan, Zendegi, Azadi Movement
Shima Tadrisi

This panel convenes scholars from multiple disciplinary backgrounds who are examining the tensions and possibilities of learning, knowledge production, and activism across Iranian and Diasporic

contexts (Canada, Europe, and the United States). Panelists consider how activism is defined and takes shape historically and transnationally within the Iranian diaspora, including through everyday practices of changemaking that emerge within social movements, family spaces, and community-based educational settings. The panelists consider how legacies of activism and culturally and linguistically sustaining practices are developed within the diaspora; how these shape families' lives, political commitments, and intergenerational approaches to parenting; and how dominant diasporic sectors can obscure the voices of marginalized activists within Iran. Collectively these papers wrestle with questions of memory, narrative, storytelling, voice, and representation as substantive, methodological, and ethical foci of the work.

Paper 1 considers the role of parenting on the Iranian left, analyzing interviews with elders and their children to understand how legacies of political activism shape intergenerational learning across time and place.

Paper 2 considers how Iranian American families navigate the political, religious, and class complexities of Iran–U.S. relations as they raise bilingual children; illuminating how parents use language, storytelling, and everyday dialogue to sustain cultural connection, foster critical awareness, and reimagine belonging within and beyond U.S. racial hierarchies.

Paper 3 follows the stories of Iranian women activists whose activism began at home but eventually led them into exile. It considers how they navigate the personal, familial, and emotional consequences of their activism, and how the departure from home reshapes their sense of safety and belonging.

Paper 4 examines how the narratives of ordinary women participating in the Woman, Life, Freedom movement inside Iran are conveyed, reshaped, or sometimes silenced in dominant diasporic representation.

Pedagogies of Political Life: Leftist Families and Intergenerational Learning in the Iranian Diaspora
by Mona Hajnaghizadeh, Shirin Vossoughi, and Mahdi Ganjavi

This paper shares key findings and analysis from a project that considers 1) how elder Iranians who identify as leftist narrate their own political learning across the life course, including how their political experiences came to shape the ways they raised their children; and 2) how the children of the left interpret the role of these political histories in their own upbringing, lives, work, and approaches to parenting. Drawing on 30 in-depth qualitative interviews with Iranian elders and their adult children in the United States and Canada, we consider the variegated ripples of Iranian revolutionary movements across time and place (Davari, 2020), with a focus on the role of parenting. The interviews are complemented by in-depth archival and historical investigations into the intellectual and everyday culture of the left as interwoven with interviewees' reflections (Matin-Asgari, 2002).

Our emergent findings trace how elders in diaspora describe their political learning as complex and ongoing, the everyday pedagogies they practiced to sustain various political and ethical values at home, and how their children build on, wrestle with, and recreate their political inheritances in myriad and dynamic ways. We further consider how the adult children of Iranian elders describe the complex ways these histories mediate interactions with their own children, and in some cases their interactions with students as educators.

We aim to bring questions of intergenerational learning (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016) into greater dialogue with scholarship on multi-scalar history (Keshavarzian & Mirsepassi, 2021), political affect (Moradian, 2022), and small histories (Sohrabi, 2020), including how social movements change the actors that forge them, and the relational inheritances that emerge over longer arcs of time.

Ordinary Women and Dominant Diasporic Narratives: Voices from the Zan, Zendegi, Azadi Movement

by Shima Tadrisi / Kiel University / shima.tadrisi@gmail.com

This paper, drawn from my Ph.D. dissertation, examines the media representation of women protesters in Iran's Woman, Life, Freedom movement. While my broader project investigates how women who may not identify as feminists or women's rights activists nonetheless play pivotal roles in shaping social and political change, this paper focuses on the disjuncture between women's narratives inside Iran and their representation in Iranian diasporic media.

Based on 100 in-depth interviews with women across Iran, alongside autoethnographic reflection, the research highlights how women describe both their everyday acts of resistance at home and their participation in protest. Moreover, I inquire into their reflections on Iran's future. Responses revealed three orientations: most expressed republican ideals; some had not yet decided or did not feel sufficiently informed; and only a few identified as constitutional monarchists.

These perspectives sharply contrast dominant diaspora narratives, particularly those shaped through activism and influential Persian-language (diaspora) satellite media such as the London-based Manoto. In these spaces, monarchist voices are disproportionately amplified and often presented as if they reflect the views of most Iranians, despite the diversity and ambivalence expressed in women's accounts inside Iran.

To analyze this gap, the paper examines Manoto's Instagram posts from February 2024, when the channel ended its television broadcasts, to the present. This period marks the channel's transition into a primarily social media platform, offering a critical site for examining how diasporic media construct political narratives about Iranian women. Using critical discourse analysis, I investigate how women's voices are reshaped, simplified, or silenced in this diasporic representation, in order to show how media portrayals diverge from the diverse realities and visions expressed by women inside Iran.

By bringing these representations into dialogue with women's own accounts, the paper highlights tensions between inside and outside voices and shows how ordinary women's perspectives complicate dominant portrayals of resistance and political imagination in contemporary Iran.

Key terms: Woman, Life, Freedom movement; ordinary women; diaspora; media representation; resistance.

Becoming and Being an Activist: Stories of Exile and In-Between Belonging among Iranian Women

by Azadeh Pourzand / PhD Candidate at the Centre for Global Media and Communications, SOAS, University of London / azadeh.pourzand@gmail.com

This paper follows the stories of Iranian women activists whose activism began inside Iran and later continued—often in different forms—in exile. Based on ethnographic fieldwork that includes twenty in-depth interviews and incorporates reflexive and autobiographical elements, it explores how participants make sense of the personal, familial, and emotional consequences of their activism, and how leaving home reshapes what it means to act, to speak, and to stay connected. The research was carried out between 2021 and 2024, spanning the period before and after the Woman, Life, Freedom movement.

Focusing on the how of activism, the paper looks at how participants describe and negotiate their use of mediated spaces and connections—through the street, social media, earlier blogging practices, and familial or informal ties maintained through messaging apps—as part of their ongoing engagement across borders. These experiences are discussed through the frameworks of becoming and being an activist (McAdam, 1986; Harris and Schwedler, 2016) and critical consciousness as a continuing and uneven process of awareness and action (Kornbluh et al., 2020). The analysis engages feminist, intersectional, and historical perspectives on Iranian women's agency and mobility

(Hoodfar, 1999; Najmabadi, 2005; Mir-Hosseini, 2009; Abrahamian, 2008; Yuval-Davis, 2011; Kia, 2023; Ghorashi, 2019), along with recent work on affective and digital activism (Papacharissi, 2020; Tufekci, 2017; Treré, 2020).
The paper offers an ethnographic perspective on how activism is lived and sustained across displacement. It reflects on the liminality of these experiences—the sense of living between places and possibilities—where activism, belonging, and voice are constantly being reworked.

Iranian Families Navigating Language, Identity, and Belonging in the United States
by Yalda M. Kaveh / Arizona State University / yalda.kaveh@asu.edu
Decades of political tensions between Iran and the U.S. have stigmatized Iranian Americans and shaped their identity and personhood. From the 1979 Hostage Crisis and 9/11 to the "Muslim Ban," Iranian Americans have faced racialization and surveillance under the guise of national security (Fayyaz & Shirazi, 2013; Mobasher, 2012). Although Islam is often used as a proxy for race to justify discrimination (Shirazi, 2019), Iranian communities are religiously and politically diverse, with many identifying as non-religious or secular (PAIIA, 2014; Tamimi Arab & Maleki, 2020). Recent geopolitical events, such as the 2025 "12-day war" involving Israel, Iran, and the U.S., have intensified intra-community divisions and prompted renewed reflection on Iranian diasporic belonging (Morris & Donnison, 2025).
Drawing on intersectionality (Collins, 2015) and desire-based frameworks (Tuck, 2009), this study examines how Iranian parents across political, religious, and generational lines engage in bilingual education and cultural transmission as acts of care, resistance, and hope. Based on interviews with 25 parents—both first-generation immigrants and second-generation Iranian Americans—whose children attend K–12 schools and community-based Persian language programs, this research highlights how families teach heritage language while fostering critical awareness of Iran's sociopolitical landscape.
Parents across diverse backgrounds described bilingual and cultural education as central to raising socially conscious, empathetic children. Some use Iranian textbooks critically; others frame Persian as a tool for connection beyond national borders. Through storytelling, activism, and language, these parents navigate the complexities of diaspora, transforming family spaces into sites of intergenerational learning and healing.
This study contributes to scholarship on the Iranian diaspora and bilingual education by showing how Iranian-American families use language and cultural learning as activism, reimagining identity, belonging, and transnational connection in times of division.

Room 2.17

43. Zoroastrianism and Iranian Literary Traditions: Continuity, Transformation, and Memory

Chair: Manya Saadi-Nejad

This panel explores the enduring presence of Zoroastrian thought, symbols, and narratives within the broader landscape of Iranian literary traditions—from antiquity through the Islamic period and into modern reinterpretations. As one of the world's oldest religions, Zoroastrianism profoundly shaped the moral, cosmological, and political imagination of ancient Iran. Even after the Arab conquest and the gradual Islamization of the Iranian plateau, many aspects of the Zoroastrian worldview and pre-Islamic Iranian beliefs continued to resonate within Persian literature and culture.
The proposed papers examine how pre-Islamic religious and mythological elements were preserved, reinterpreted, or strategically transformed in later literary contexts. Topics may include the literary afterlife of Avestan themes in epics such as Ferdowsi's Šāh-nāmeh; the incorporation of Zoroastrian ethical principles in medieval Persian poetry and prose; and the reinterpretation of Zoroastrian symbols and narratives in modern or diasporic literature. Some papers may also address questions of cultural memory and the tension between erasure and survival of Zoroastrian identity within

dominant Islamic discourses.
By bringing together scholars working across literary periods and disciplines, this panel seeks to foster a nuanced understanding of how pre-Islamic Iranian religions have contributed to shaping Iranian cultural identity. The goal is not only to trace historical influences but also to consider how Iranian literature and culture have functioned as dynamic spaces of negotiation between religious continuity and transformation. The panel welcomes philological, literary, and historical approaches and encourages interdisciplinary dialogue on this vital yet underexplored dimension of Iranian studies.

Contesting Sacral Kingship: Kingship and Religion in Dēnkard III
by Ted Good / Ruhr-Universität Bochum / theodore.good@gmail.com
Sacral Kingship specifies the intimacy between royal and religion authority, and so it is part of the discussion of kingship and religion that exists in the Iranian tradition from the ancient Avesta to the Shāhnāme. In Zoroastrian literature from the ninth century, the encyclopedic Dēnkard preserves philosophical reflections on Sacral Kingship as well as the more general topic of Zoroastrian political philosophy. Dēnkard III discusses it both conceptually, in terms of abstract distinctions and definitions, as well as narratively, in terms of stories and characters concretely exemplifying those abstract concepts.
Sacral Kingship is most commonly discussed in the J̌am-Dahāg Cycle. Both characters are ancient: J̌am (← Av. Yima-) is the paradigmatically good king, while Dahāg (← Av. Dahāka-) is the paradigmatically tyrannical leader in Dēnkard III. Dēnkard III usually produces conceptual analyses by generating contrasting lists, and this continues with Sacral Kingship. We see the contrast between the Good Religion and the Bad Religion, Glory (xwarrah) and Ignominy (dušfargīh), and being Iranian and being Arab. These oppositional contrasts are exemplified with J̌am and Dahāg, either in allusions or in narrative vignettes.
This paper will sketch the basic theory of Sacral Kingship in Dēnkard III, and it will exemplify the abstract conceptual analyses with some of the concrete narratives of J̌am and Dahāg. I will suggest that the J̌am-Dahāg cycle in Dēnkard III shows one possible political myth current among Zoroastrians in the early Islamic period.

Zarathustra Across Time: Tradition, Adaptation, and Narrative
by Massimiliano Vassalli / Researcher specialising in Zoroastrian studies
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This paper examines the figure of Zarathustra as constructed within Middle Persian and New Persian Zoroastrian sources. In Middle Persian texts – primarily Dēnkard VII and Wizīdagīhā ī Zādspram – Zarathustra is portrayed in ways that reflect features inherited from the Sasanian period, when Zoroastrianism was the dominant religion, although these texts were compiled during the Early Islamic era. In contrast, New Persian works, such as the Mawlūd-e Zarātušt, present Zarathustra after Zoroastrianism had become a minority religion in Iran, with the narrative around him adapting to the new cultural context. Additionally, the Wizirgerd ī dēnīg – a work that has been argued to be a 19th-century production – offers yet another portrayal of Zarathustra. By tracing these shifts from Pahlavi to New Persian, the study highlights how Zoroastrians reimagined their founder in response to changing political and religious landscapes. The evolving image of Zarathustra thus illuminates both the resilience of communal identity and the creative strategies of self-representation employed by a tradition negotiating its continuity under Islamic hegemony.

The Legacy of Miθra for the Iranian Nationalist Sentiment
by Nina Mazhjoo / Centre Léon Robin, Sorbonne Université / mazhjoo.nina@yahoo.com

Approximately a century ago, Frantz Cumont delineated a category of the Oriental Cults that dominated the field of Mithraic studies for several decades. According to his perspective, known as the School of Iranisanté, the Roman Mithras cult originated from Iranian roots and was transmitted to Rome via the Magi residing in ancient Anatolia and Asia Minor. Subsequently, the emergence of postcolonial studies shifted scholarly focus from Cumont's theory of cultural diffusion toward a more profound understanding of cultural reception and integration—highlighting the Mithras cult as a Roman invention, best understood as a form of cultural integration driven by specific cultural requirements and political strategies. Nevertheless, despite numerous developments and updates in Roman scholarship, Iranian studies on the Mithras cult continue to emphasize the Cumontian paradigm, interpreting the cult's ritual-visual language in terms of its supposed Iranian origin. Moreover, political reformers have appropriated the traditional scope of Mithraic studies to advance their own political agendas, while intellectual groups have adopted the Cumontian approach to construct a myth of Miθra/Mithras relating to the discourse of Iran's historical grandeur. Relying on these two narratives, then, the deity and his cult serve as symbols of pre-Islamic national identity for the general populace, resisting contemporary socio-political conditions at home.
This research, therefore, examines the historical development of Mithraic studies, with a particular focus on Iranian scholarship. It highlights the Mithras cult's contribution to fostering Iranian nationalist sentiments and promoting socio-political reforms. This study aims to investigate how Mithraic studies have been appropriated to construct a venerable yet mythical past, through which Iranians navigate their identity beyond the often fragile circumstances of their present. Key questions addressed in this work include the role of Mithraic scholarship in romanticizing Iran's historical past and the legacy of the Iranisanté school for Iranian national identity.

Ancient Iranian Mythological and Religious Reminiscences in the Medieval Georgian Chronicle "Life of Kartli"

by Helen Giunashvili / G.Tsereteli Institute of Oriental Studies/Ilia State University
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Iranian-Georgian cultural contacts have a long history and deep roots. The Georgian culture has adopted and originally transformed artistic and spiritual achievements of the neighboring Iran. These influences significantly touched all the spheres of the Georgian cultural life, particularly, literature and language.
The beginning of Persian-Georgian literary contacts is usually traced back to the 11-12th centuries, when Georgian secular literature first developed and flourished.
However, the roots of Georgian-Persian cultural- literary relations run much deeper.
At the beginning of the 4th century, Christianity was proclaimed as the official religion in Georgia. Eastern Christianity specifically disseminated the Christian faith among peoples in local languages; consequently, all religious services and songs were performed in their native languages. The Christianization of Georgia entailed extensive translation of Christian writings as well as creation of original literature in the national script and language. But, it should be mentioned that ancient tribes of Georgia, already in the pre-Christian period, had a well-established oral literary tradition and folklore, which mostly stimulated the development of national prose and poetry. Traces of rich folkloric tradition, where ancient Iranian motives were significantly reflected, must be sought in the style and tendencies of later Georgian secular literary works and in medieval Georgian historiography.
The 11th-century Georgian Chronicle "Life of Kartli" mentions several Middle Iranian names connected with ancient Iranian mythological, religious, and epic traditions, such as Artavaz, Spandiat, Vaštašab/Vištap, Bēvrasp/ (Aždahāg), etc.
The "Life of Kartli" also contains passages referring to the episodes from the "Shah-nameh,"

indicating that the author, Leonti Mroveli, was familiar with the Xwadāy-nāmag as well as ancient Iranian folklore.
The paper presents a survey of Iranian Reminiscences in the “Life of Kartli”.

The Primal Man and the Dragon: Zoroastrian Mythological Motifs in the Šāh-nāmeh
by Manya Saadi-Nejad / Iranian mythology /Ancient Iranian Languages/ Art / manya.sa@gmail.com
Pre-Islamic Iran inherited a diverse pantheon of deities from Indo-European and Mesopotamian cultures, with remnants evident in literature, legends, and Zoroastrianism.The major sources for Iranian mythology are the pre-Islamic Iran’s texts and literature, including the Avesta and Middle Persian texts. The Shāh-nāmeh (“Book of Kings”), a tenth-century epic poem which celebrates the glories of Iran’s pre-Islamic past, is another important source.
The Avesta, the sacred scripture of the Zoroastrians, is a collection of mostly ritual texts, the oldest parts of which date back to the 2nd millennium BCE. The Avesta was transmitted through the oral tradition of the Zoroastrian priests until it was eventually written down, presumably around 600 CE. Since then the oral tradition has continued alongside the written one up to the present day. These texts are preserved in an ancient Iranian language not attested by any other sources.
The Šāh-nāmeh
One of the most important sources for studying representations of ancient Iran in the early Islamic period is the 10th-century national epic, the Šāh-nāmeh (“Book of Kings”). The Book of Kings contain themes and symbols from not only Zoroastrianism and ancient Iranian mythology, but also Mesopotamian and other sources as well. Many of the characters in the Iranian national epic, the Šāh-nāmeh are also found in the Avesta and in the Middle Persian Texts.

Room 2.18

44. Diversity and Modernity in Contemporary Shi`i Iranian Thought and Practice

Chair: Meir Litvak

This panel explores the dynamic and complex interplay between Shi`i doctrine and politics within the Islamic Republic of Iran, an interaction that has continually reshaped both state ideology and religious practice in response to modernity and state needs. Drawing on the writings and activities of state organs, intellectuals, and popular players, the four papers in this panel analyze diverse dimensions of this ongoing dialogue.

• Tradition, Belonging, and Cultural Agency: Voices from Azeri Iran, analyzes how maddāḥān (eulogists and praisers) among Azeris foster identification of Azeris with the broader Shi‘i and revolutionary ethos. It also reveals how they create space for their Azeri heritage, while navigating the regime's emphasis on Persian cultural dominance. This cultural blend is further exemplified in their music. By employing diverse video techniques, they connect the historical tragedy of Imam Husayn and the enduring sense of identification and relevance of his legacy in the current era.

• Beyond the Epic of Karbala: The Political Myth of Imam Hasan’s Peace as a Vehicle for Justifying Compromise in the Islamic Republic of Iran examines how competing factions have used the Imam’s relinquishing of power after his army deserted to either justify or reject political compromise, particularly regarding the nuclear issue. While promoted by Supreme Leader Khamenei, the paper also shows how agents of memory from below reframe the past to serve current agendas.

• Resisting and Embracing Existence and Historicity: Contemporary Iranian Intellectuals and the Lessons of Heidegger explores how the appropriation of Heidegger’s thought in the Shia context has resulted in reified forms of 'traditionism' rooted in recovering an ‘ideal’ plane of phenomenological space, occluded by post-Enlightenment Western rationalism and materialism filtered into Iran by the colonial encounter. It also shows how Iranian Heideggarianisms have been utilized to buttress and enchant the Islamic Republic.

• Apostasy in Modern Iranian-Shi`i Discourse and Practice investigates the criteria defining apostasy

in cotemporary Iranian Shi`i thought and the debate over the appropriate punishment. It discusses how Shi`i writers apply the western-liberal criteria of the limits of liberty to justify the execution of the apostate as a defense of the rights of God and the Muslim community. Concurrently, it shows a gap between the harsh official rhetoric and some caution in excessively applying the stipulated punishments.
• Together, these papers offer insights into the evolving landscape of contemporary Shi`i thought and its implications for Iranian politics.

Apostasy in Modern Iranian-Shi`i Discourse
by Meir Litvak / Professor at the Department of Middle Eastern and African History and Director of the Alliance Center for Iranian Studies at Tel Aviv University / litvak@tauex.tau.ac.il
This paper examines several aspects of modern Shi`i-Iranian attitudes toward apostasy, an offense considered most serious across monotheistic religions for allegedly rejecting exclusive divine truth. The consensus among Shi`i jurists prohibits believers from converting to any other faith or renouncing Islam publicly by words or deeds.
In modern Shi`i Islamism, apostasy carries an additional political dimension, seen as a rebellion against the Islamic social and political order and as defection to the enemy's camp. The paper will specifically address:
• The particular Shi`i tenets whose rejection renders the charge of apostasy, notably denial of the Imamat of the twelve Shi`i Imams, and deriving from it denial of clerical political authority (Velayat) in its broader sense.
• The historical debate concerning the alleged apostasy of the Prophet's Companions (Sahaba) who purportedly betrayed Imam `Ali after the Prophet's death—a major point of acrimony between Sunnis and Shi`is throughout history.
• The contemporary debate regarding the appropriate punishment for the apostate, particularly whether the death sentence is obligatory or subject to the judge's discretion.
• How Shi`i writers employ Western-liberal criteria regarding the limits of liberty to justify the execution of the apostate, equating the apostate's statements and deeds with a "cancer that threatens the life of society" and presenting the punishment as a defense of the basic rights of God and the Muslim community.
The paper will also examine several cases where the Islamic Republic has punished people for apostasy, primarily as a tool to suppress internal dissent. Finally, it will highlight a recent gap compared to the early revolutionary era between the harsh rules against alleged apostates and the caution in excessively applying the stipulated punishments. The analysis is based on a large corpus of religious publications, including books, scholarly articles, and clerical internet websites.

Beyond the Epic of Karbala: The Political Myth of Imam Hasan's Peace as a Vehicle for Justifying Compromise in the Islamic Republic of Iran
by Omer Carmi / Tel Aviv University / omercarmi@mail.tau.ac.il
Like other revolutionary regimes before it, the Islamic Republic of Iran has discovered that the encounter between ideology and reality often necessitates dramatic compromises to ensure its survival. This paper examines how the Iranian regime has drawn upon historical precedents of defeat and compromise by expemplar figures in Islamic history to legitimize its own ideological concessions.
At the center of this discussion stands the political myth of Imam Hasan, the second Shii Imam. According to Shii tradition, Imam Hasan relinquished his claim to the caliphate after his army deserted and rebelled against him amid a struggle over Islamic leadership. For centuries, his figure remained marginal within Shii collective memory, overshadowed by his brother Imam

Hossein, whose martyrdom at Karbala came to embody heroic resistance and sacrifice.
As this study demonstrates, Iran's contemporary political challenges have revived and reinterpreted the image of Imam Hasan, which has been mobilized by competing factions to justify or reject compromise - particularly in debates over the nuclear issue. While Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, has played a central role in cultivating this political myth, the remembrance of Imam Hasan's peace is not a top-down construct. Rather, it has emerged through ongoing interaction between state leadership and diverse agents of memory, who reframe the past to serve current agendas.
Drawing on previously untranslated Persian sources, this paper offers an innovative perspective on Shii narratives of defeat and compromise, moving beyond the epic of Karbala to reveal how the myth of Imam Hasan's peace functions as a theological and political paradigm for compromise in the Islamic Republic.

Resisting and Embracing Existence and Historicity: Contemporary Iranian Intellectuals and the Lessons of Heidegger

by Ezra Tzfadya / senior fellow at the Indiana University-Bloomington's Center for the Study of the Middle East (CSME) / etzfadya@iu.edu

In the shadow of Daryush Schayegan, Ahmad Fardid and Seyed Hossein Nasr, the appropriation of Heidegger's thought into the Iranian Shia context, frequently occurring via the thought of Henri Corbin, has often resulted in reified forms of 'traditionism.' Such traditionism is rooted in unveiling and recovering an 'ideal' plane of phenomenological space (arcing from Suhrawardy to Sadra) occluded by post-Enlightenment Western rationalism and materialism filtered into Iran by the colonial encounter. Iranian Heideggarianisms have in turn been utilized by those like Fardid to buttress and enchant the Islamic Republic post-1979, echoing Heidegger's aims to 'enchant' the nascent National Socialist polity in Germany. These figures sought to harness Heideggerian insights to resolve what Alireza Shomali has identified as a core element in contemporary Iranian-Shia political thought, namely the age-old Platonic disparity dictum regarding the relationship between intellectually refined philosophic elites and the masses.
From the resources of the contemporary subdiscipline of political theology, I wish to sketch an alternate path for a 'native' form of metaphysical-political critique, one robustly rooted in the Iranian-Islamic philosophic tradition, yet cognizant of the dangers to democratic republicanism that such hierarchized elitist reifications produce within the politics of a post secular age. I will rely on two contemporary Jewish Heideggarianisms (Elliot Wolfson and Elad Lapidot) that seek to bring Heidegger's thought into creative tension with the Kabbalistic and Talmudic traditions for the sake of democratic-republican critique.

Tradition, Belonging, and Cultural Agency: Voices from Azeri Iran

By Elisheva Machlis / Bar-Ilan University / elisheva.machlis@biu.ac.il

This paper analyzes how *maddāḥān* (eulogists and praisers) among Azeris foster identification of Azeris with the broader Shi'i and revolutionary ethos. It also reveals how they create space for their Azeri heritage, while navigating the regime's emphasis on Persian cultural dominance. This cultural blend is further exemplified in their music. By employing diverse video techniques, they connect the historical tragedy of Imam Husayn and the enduring sense of identification and relevance of his legacy in the current era.

Room 2.19

45. Bridging Scholarship and Devotion: The Twelver Shi'i Supplication (duʿā) Corpus in its Persianate Context

Chair: Sarah Aziz

This panel focuses on the genre of supplication (duʿā), particularly, the corpus of Shi'i prayers attributed to the Prophet and the Imams. Our panel takes an interdisciplinary approach towards this large corpus, connecting historical, literary, and performative approaches to the genre. The papers in this panel explore different ways that scholars and the pious across different time periods, namely, the Safavid and Qajar periods up to the contemporary times have interacted with this corpus through prayer manuals, commentaries, and ritual performance. We delve into questions of use and scholarly reception through the different lenses of devotion, translation, theological reflection, and spiritual instruction. Together, the first two papers highlight the scholarly engagement with the duʿā corpus across different theological persuasions within Twelver Shi'ism. The second two papers turn towards the literary dimensions of these prayers and their use in devotional and pedagogical contexts. A common concern across these investigations is the interaction between Arabic and Persian as the two languages of composition and commentary on the genre within its Persianate context. Taken together, our findings highlight how the prayer genre lies at the intersection of several scholarly discourses, underscoring their interconnectedness through this often neglected corpus.

Transforming Prayer: An Inquiry into Quṭbuddīn Nayrīzī's (d. 1173/ 1760) Poetic Reconfiguration of Duʿā-yi Ṣabāḥ

by Sarah Aziz / Harvard University / saziz@g.harvard.edu

In this paper, I examine the Tarjuma-yi Manẓūma-yi Duʿā-yi Ṣabāḥ of Sayyid Quṭbuddin Nayrīzī (d. 1173/ 1760), the thirty-second head of the Dhahabiyya Sufi order. The Tarjuma is a poetic reconfiguration in Persian of Duʿāʾ al-Ṣabāh, the morning prayer in rhymed Arabic prose (sajʿ) attributed to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/ 661). Focusing on the opening segment of the prayer, I analyze Nayrīzī's corresponding quatrains (rubāʿiyyāt) in relation to his prose translation and commentary on that same prayer. My paper explores the following questions: how do the verse and prose translations (tarjuma) compare? What does the versification accomplish? How do we understand Nayrīzī's translation as a work of Sufi-Shii prayer commentary? In light of these questions, I reflect on the dynamics of "translation" and the relationship between literary form and function when it comes to the genre of prayers. More broadly, I situate my analysis of Nayrīzī's mystically oriented tarjuma within the broader milieu of scholarly intellectual and devotional interaction with the Shii du'ā' corpus through the form of commentary during the Safavid period.

Technologies of Duʿāʾ: Bilingualism and the Aesthetics of Supplication

by Rana Ghuloom / University of Chicago / rghuloom@uchicago.edu

This paper explores the effects of bilingualism on pious reading and listening practices specifically in Persian Twelver duʿāʾ manuals and contemporary supplication recitations in Iran. I first look at the movement between Persian and Arabic in Mafātīḥ al-Jinān by ʾAbbās ibn Muḥammad Riḍā al-Qummī (d. 1945), as a collection representative of Twelver Persian supplication manuals. In these manuals the duʿāʾ scripts that the supplicant is to recite in their speech with God are retained in their original Arabic form, while the paratextual instructions and instances of storytelling that associate the Imams with different supplications are presented in Persian. This movement between languages echoes another movement between different narrative modes; one that is descriptive, allowing the reader to observe and imagine the Imams in their acts of supplication, and one that is performative where the reciter inserts themselves into the Arabic supplicatory words attributed to the Imams. By using translation theory that proposes its study as corporeal transfer, one that generates connection to other places, times, or persons, this talk charts the Persian text's attachment and relationship to the Arabic words of the Imams, as cultivating relational reading practices for its reciter, who through reading becomes in relation to past and future worlds and persons. The second part of the talk turns to visual and audio analysis of video recordings of communal supplication recitations edited for

various Iranian television channels. This section builds on the earlier one to trace the relationship between Arabic source and various practices of translation executed in real-time by the reciter – through side translation, interpretation, instruction, storytelling, emotion, accent and musicality – as well as by the videos' visual storytelling techniques. This analysis takes the supplicatory text a step further to highlight how sound, space, and technology work together in the supplicatory genre to engender a Shīʿī life-world, with its specific relational reading and listening practices, where God, the Prophet, and his family continue to be lived with as co-presences in this world.

The devotional confessions of an Infallible Imam: A Study of Safavid Era Duʿāʾ Commentary
by Vinay Khetia / Shia Research Institute / vkhetia@shiaresearch.ca
This paper will examine one simple question: can an infallible (maʿṣūm) Imam repent for 'misdeeds' or 'sins' and if so, how is this to be understood? This paper will focus specifically on how Safavid scholars such as Mullā Ṣadrā (d.1641 CE.), Muhammad Taqī al-Majlisī (d.1660), Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Māzandarānī (d.1675 C.E.) and Muhammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d.1699 C.E.), have attempted to interpret this question by commenting on a famous supplication of the seventh Imam, Mūsā b. Jaʿfar (d.799 C.E.) in which he utters a series of confessions in his supplication which include the following statement: " I have disobeyed you with my tongue (aṣaytuka bi-lisānī)" in addition to numerous others with a similar confessional tone. When confronted with such confessions of sin or disobedience by an Imam, these Shiʿī authorities albeit of different scholarly persuasions felt compelled to compose apologia replete with scholarly conjectures all of which share the common goal in affirming their shared belief in the infallibility of the Imams. These writers would employ the hermeneutics of language, theological principles, and mystical maxims all to reconcile the seeming paradox of an infallible Imam who is deserving of unquestionable obedience (ṭāʿa) while also manifesting confessions of their own alleged disobedience to God How can these two states be reconciled? Were such expressions to be simply interpreted as teaching moments meant for their sinful followers or reflective of an inner esoteric spiritual state requiring scholarly exposition? This paper will assert that the literature produced by these Safavid scholars on this subject indicate that supplication literature was a site of active theological speculations deployed in this case to uncover the 'true' meanings of such provocative devotional expressions.

Guiding Spirits, Guarding Doctrine: Reading Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kirmānī's (d. 1288/1871) ʿIlāj al-arwāḥ in Qajar Iran
by Gianni Izzo / Seldon Institute / gizzo11@gmail.com
This paper examines ʿIlāj al-arwāḥ ("The Healing of Spirits"), a Qajar-period Arabic/Persian manual on spiritual healing by Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kirmānī (d. 1288/1871), the third leader of the Shaykhī Imāmī Shiʿi school. Extending his earlier work on physical medicine, Kirmānī turns to spiritual care, presenting duʿāʾ (supplication) and various pietistic mediums—ḥujub/ aḥrāz (protective prayers), ʿawādh (amulets), and hayākil (talismanic diagrams)—as vital means of apotropaic protection. He situates their use within a Shaykhī metaphysical hierarchy, in which divine influence flows through exalted angels to lower spirits, whose interaction with human subtle essences shapes actions and ailments. Accordingly, healing operates by directing benevolent spirits and repelling malignant ones, while improper application without ritual knowledge and moral refinement risks harm or inadvertent shirk. Although talismanic practices circulated widely in Qajar Iran, often mediated by marginalized elements such as Jews, dervishes, and Romani healers, Kirmānī seeks to regulate their use, distinguishing formulas sanctioned by Imamic authority from those of uncertain origin. In this study, I analyze his classification of spirits, protocols for amulet preparation, and hierarchies of spiritual intervention to show how Shaykhī leadership asserted doctrinally informed oversight over popular practices that were otherwise socially diffuse and unsystematic.

15:45 – 16:00
Coffee Break

16:00-18:00 Janskerkhof 2/3

Room 0.13

46. Iranian Studies in a Time of War: Crisis, Continuity, and the Future of the Field.
Chair: Claudia Yaghoobi

Participants: Dr. Houchang Chehabi, Dr. Touraj Atabaki, Dr. Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet; Dr. Bahar Abdi, Dr. Pooyan Tamimi Arab, Dr. Arash Ghajarjazi.

Room 0.17

47. Sensuous Sheets: Decorated Papers in Premodern Manuscript Cultures
Chair: Ilse Sturkenboom

This panel investigates the emergence, circulation, and adaptation of decorated paper across Chinese, Islamicate, and European manuscript cultures spanning the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries. The papers highlight how artists strategically incorporated printed, stencilled, silhouetted, and marbled sheets to augment folios to engage, entertain, and enthuse viewers.

The first paper discusses the meaning and connotations of woodblock-printed Chinese gilt papers within fifteenth-century Timurid-era manuscripts and Chinese handscrolls. It illustrates how Turco-Persian artists adapted imported luxury items to connote royalty, rarity, mysticism and a certain form of exotism and asks how Ming-Chinese appreciations of the same paper may have informed the Timurid and Turkman reception.

The second paper turns to stencilling employed across Greater Iran, Central Asia and South Asia. Vegetal, zoomorphic, and figural motifs systematically repeat, reflect, and vary across folios. Far from marginal, stencilling emerges as a widely practiced yet critically understudied method of embellishment that facilitated the transfer of motifs across workshops and regions.

The third paper examines silhouetted paper in Ottoman manuscripts. A related but distinctly innovative method apart from stencilling, silhouetting produced subtle but striking visual effects. Collected by Ottomans and Europeans alike, these designs warrant renewed attention.

The final paper reviews combined marbling (abrī) and masking methods from the Islamicate world and Europe. It describes Ottoman and Deccani examples, European alba amicorum (books of friendship), and ultimately, its application as the first polychrome security device on early British and American currency and financial instruments.

Together, these contributions demonstrate how decorated papers served as more than merely decorative, incidental, embellishments, but highly impactful technologies. They dramatically transformed manuscript making, related reading practices, and fostered novel social and economic conventions.

Motifs in Motion: Stencilled Designs in Persianate Manuscripts
by Theresa Zischkin / Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich / t.zischkin@lmu.de
This paper explores the practice of stencilled decoration in Persianate manuscripts from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century, tracing its circulation across Greater Iran, Central Asia, and South Asia. Beginning with the so-called “Yazd Anthology” (British Library, Or. 8193), dated to the first half of the fifteenth century, the study traces stencils from diverse contexts. It culminates in codices elaborately refurbished by the atelier of Mughal nobleman ʿAbd al-Raḥīm Khān-i Khānān (1556–1627) such as the Panj Ganj (Five Treasures) by Jāmī (1414–1492, Chester Beatty, In 20).

Across these examples, stencilled margins range from delicate vegetal scrolls and geometric repeats to dynamic zoomorphic and figural motifs, often integrated into broader decorative programmes. The evidence suggests that stencils were employed not only for efficiency and replication, but also for aesthetic experimentation, as designs were systematically mirrored and colour schemes varied. Their use reveals both a modular logic of production and a remarkable degree of creative flexibility. Far from being a rare curiosity, stencilling emerges as a widely practiced yet critically understudied method of embellishment: stencils operated as repeatable design units tailored to specific artistic preferences, which intersected with broader manuscript enhancement and refurbishment practices. As variant methods proliferated in workshops across regions, they also facilitated the transfer of motifs. Therefore, stencilling methods functioned as a key strategy for visual enhancement that not only reframed texts materially but also shaped readers' visual perception and contemplative engagement with them.

Silhouetted Paper: A Lost Tradition of Royally Favoured Decoration

by Negar Kazemipourleilabadi / Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München / n.kazemipourleilabad@lmu.de

This paper investigates the Ottoman technique of silhouetted paper, a distinctive form of decoration that emerged in the mid-sixteenth century and became a favored embellishment in manuscripts such as Sultan Süleyman's Dīvān-i Muḥibbī (e.g., Topkapı Palace Museum library R 738m). Closely associated with the imperial atelier, silhouetted paper introduced a striking visual vocabulary of floral, geometric, and zoomorphic motifs.

Its precise origins and methods of production remain uncertain, but the process appears to have involved matrices or molds that enabled repeated impressions, resulting in patterns produced in both positive and negative forms. In contemporaneous sources, the technique is referred to under varying terms, which reflects both the ambiguity of its processes and the The plurality of practices it encompassed.

Although related practices are attested in Iran and Transoxiana, silhouetted paper seems to have reached particular refinement in sixteenth-century Istanbul, where it contributed to the flourishing of new decorative arts under imperial patronage. Its presence in albums and manuscripts that circulated to Europe further highlight its role in cross-cultural exchange and Its importance in the emergence of a distinctively Ottoman book art.

This study approaches silhouetted paper as both a material and a cultural phenomenon. Through codicological case studies of manuscripts containing this decoration, it analyzes motifs, color palettes, and techniques to reconstruct how the papers were made and employed.

Beyond technical reconstruction, the paper also considers the significance of silhouetted paper in shaping the visual identity of Ottoman book culture and reassessing its contribution to broader histories of decorated paper within the Persianate world.

Turco-Persian Masked Marbling and Its Impact

by Jake Benson / Soudavar Fellow for Persian Collections, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester; Freelance Postdoctoral Researcher, GlobalDecoPaper Project, Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich / jaikiebenson@gmail.com

Paper marbling, known as abrī (clouding) in Persian, emerged during an initial 'first wave" in the long sixteenth century. Towards the end of that nascent period, Ottoman marblers adhered papercut geometric designs to sheets of paper before marbling them to create blank reserves within the colourful designs. Many examples survive, the earliest found within European alba amicorum (Latin books of friendship). In the early seventeenth century, after a second 'wave' of advanced patterning emerged in the Deccan, South Asian marblers crafted entire blank, pre-decorated books. Using cut

paper stencils and fluid gum resists, they produced various formats and page layouts, within which clients could write or draw whatever they wished, and prefabricated album mounts with floral margins. These stationery practices, led to production of visual imagery recalling famous paintings, portraits, and iconography emerged. While attributed to the Deccan Sultanates, these 'marbled drawings' probably first emerged there and then spread elsewhere in the subcontinent.
Masked marbling also appeared in Europe, imitating Ottoman designs, although other patterns notably differed, such as armorials, Jamnitzer-inspired polyhedra, Gothic church spires, and even urban landscapes. Another example consciously places ovoids within a marbled, combed design, in which a painter rendered various bulbous flowers, inspired by Dutch and Flemish still-life paintings. The Bank of England applied masked marbling to seventeenth and eighteenth-century currency, cheques, and promissory notes, to deter fraud and counterfeiting. Banks offered clients security-marbled cheque books. Benjamin Franklin employed such stock for the first Continental Congress $20 bill note emission of 1775, and French promissory notes to finance the American Revolution. Therefore, masking and marbling not only entertained Islamicate and European societies, it also ultimately secured the very independence of the United States, for without financing against British adversaries, it would not be a separate nation today.

Meanings of 'Chinese' paper in Timurid-era manuscripts and in Ming China
by Ilse Sturkenboom, co-authored with Yih-chuen Liao / LMU Munich / ilse.sturkenboom@lmu.de
The terminology 'Chinese' paper has, since about a century, been used to refer to a distinctive type of colourful, heavy, and glossy paper that was decorated on one side with gold motifs and gold flecking or sprinkling. In the fifteenth-century, it was employed for select Timurid and Turkman manuscripts. Fibre analyses, the original dimensions of the paper sheets, and the use of woodblock printing techniques to produce the gold motifs all point to an East Asian origin for this decorated paper. Indeed, Ming-era artists used identifiably similar papers as frontispieces placed in front of calligraphy or paintings within handscrolls. Although it remains uncertain how exactly this paper ended up in Timurid and Turkman book workshops, it appears highly likely that it played roles in Ming-Timurid diplomatic exchanges.
This presentation aims to explore the meanings that 'Chinese' paper may have held in the Timurid era and during the Ming. Beginning with an examination of its use in Timurid and Turkman manuscripts – considering their subjects, patrons or recipients, and choice of motifs – it discusses the paper's connotations of exotism, mysticism, rarity, and royalty. It then considers the lesser-studied Ming use of this paper within the broader history of printed, gold-flecked, and gold-decorated stationery paper in China. Furthermore, it examines the historical significance of the motifs printed onto the 'Chinese' paper.
Ultimately, this presentation seeks to address questions such as: How common was 'Chinese' paper in Ming China? Was its use restricted to the imperial court? What relationship, if any, did its motifs bear to the texts or artworks they accompanied? Might it have been created or selected primarily for export to the Islamic world? And how did the meanings and associations of this paper in Ming China shape its reception among the Timurids and Turkmen?

Room 0.19

48. Iranian Queer Imaginaries Across Media

Chair: Ladan Rahbari

This panel traces the shifting terrains of Iranian queer world-making across three media forms—magazines, cinema, and theatre—to explore how LGBTQ+ Iranians imagine belonging, resistance, and futurity under conditions of repression inside and outside of Iran. Moving from archival to speculative practices, the panel follows a historical and affective trajectory from the emergence of queer counterpublics in early print and digital magazines, through cinematic experiments that resist

victimhood narratives, to participatory theatre that reclaims collective liberation. The first paper, From Visibility to Care: The Emergence of a Queer Iranian Counterpublic through Early Queer Magazines (1990s–2000s), examines Homan (1990–2002) and MAHA (2004–2006) as foundational queer Iranian magazines that formed counterpublics through community-building and activism, and alternative modes of visibility and care across diaspora and domestic contexts. The second paper, "Persistent Moves: Trans* Narratives on Iranian Screen", turns to contemporary Iranian films of varying genres: Facing Mirrors (2008), Invasion (2017), Cold Breath (2017). By tracing how trans* characters in these films navigate the policed public space and the heteronormative domestic space, the researcher explores the cinematic motifs that tell a tale of a persistent search for a sense of collectivity and belonging. The third paper, Scripts from the Foyer: Deferred Liberation of queer and trans Iranians, introduces a research-creation project using participatory theatre to center queer and trans voices excluded from Iranian revolutionary imaginaries and to reimagine inclusive futures through embodied storytelling.
We discuss that these practices illuminate how queer Iranian cultural production, across media and generations, constructs spaces of resistance and imagination. By challenging both Western tropes of queer victimhood and nationalist exclusions, these practices offer vital archives and rehearsals of alternative futures for collective liberation.

Scripts from the Foyer: Deferred Liberation of queer and trans Iranians

by Faezeh Daemi / McMaster University / daemif@mcmaster.ca

This research-creation project explores differed political inclusion of queer and trans communities within contemporary Iranian liberation movements. Grounded in the metaphor of the foyer as a collective liminal space, and drawing from queer, feminist, and decolonial frameworks, this project examines how LGBTQ+ rights are repeatedly postponed or deprioritized in revolutionary and activist imaginaries. Through participatory theatre, it seeks to document and amplify the lived experiences, activist practices, and leadership of queer and trans Iranians. The project also responds to the current climate of when state violence and censorship in Iran intersect with rising anti-immigrant and anti-2SLGBTQi+ sentiment in North America by creating space for collective voices and embodied storytelling. Ultimately, the project aims to raise public awareness around the necessity of confronting queer bias and reimagine more inclusive visions of liberation.
Keywords: deferred liberation, queer and trans Iranians, LGBTQ+ rights, participatory theatre as research-creation.

From Visibility to Care: The Emergence of a Queer Iranian Counterpublic through Early Queer Magazines (1990s–2000s)

by Meraj Sharifi / University of Copenhagen / msha@hum.ku.dk

This article explores the formation of Iranian queer counterpublics through a comparative reading of two queer Iranian magazines: Homan, a diasporic print magazine (1990–2002), and MAHA, a digital magazine published inside Iran (2004–2006). While existing scholarship has contributed to our understanding of Iranian queer identity formation, victimhood narratives shaped by Western discourse, and digital queer subjectivities, less attention has been paid to early queer magazines as agentic interventions that functioning as active sites of queer subject formation. Through a close archival reading of 49 issues in Persian, I trace how these magazines articulated strategies of visibility, activism, and care that challenged both diasporic heteronormativity and state repression, as well as Western orientalist framings of Iranian queerness. The analysis shows that these magazines constructed two distinct modes of counterpublics under divergent socio-political and technological conditions. Homan, situated in the diaspora, relied on visible and extroverted forms of activism to assert queer presence within a heteronormative exile community. In contrast, MAHA, operating within Iran's repressive digital landscape, engaged in implicit resistance through networks

of care and solidarity. By bringing queer diaspora and queer digital activism discourse together, this paper aims to contribute to decolonial queer studies as well as Iranian queer history through foregrounding these early queer media practices as crucial archives of community-making and cultural production within Majority World contexts.

“Persistent Moves: Trans* Narratives on Iranian Screen”
by Shekoufeh Behbehani / University of Amsterdam / s.m.m.a.a.behbehani@uva.nl
Mobilized by a fatwa (legal opinion) issued by Ayatollah Khomeini, the legal recognition of trans* individuals in today’s Iran is conditional upon their submission to a pathologizing process: acquiring an official ‘diagnosis’ and undergoing medical transitioning. Stagings of gender non-normativity in Iranian cinema are often through a similarly pathologizing lens. Gently shifting the conversation from identity politics to questions of belonging are three Iranian films that feature trans* protagonists: Facing Mirrors (2012) and Cold Breath (2017), and Invasion (2017). In Facing Mirrors and Cold Breath, trans* presence leaks into the city, signifying above all a deep desire to belong. Whether navigating policed public space or heteronormative domestic space in Cold Breath and Facing Mirrors, or an imagined dystopian world in Invasion, the protagonists are in constant clash with authority. In their dance with forms of discipline and control, certain motifs and allusions emerge that connect the stories across varying genres. The paper explores how allusions to Ta'ziyeh, along with the motif of mirrors, create variations of a persistent trans* cinematic look in these narratives.

Room 0.21

49. Roundtable: Iranian Masculinities Across Time - Part II

Chair: Haleh Emrani, Janet Afary

This is the second part of a two-part roundtable that offers a deep historical perspective on the evolution of Iranian masculinities across time.
The chair will begin with a brief introduction to the state’s emphasis on a Shi’i neo-patriarchal order since 1979. This introduction will be followed by four papers, which examine:
1. The performance of masculinity in post-revolutionary Iranian cinema
2. Masculinities in the cinema of Abbas Kiarostami
3. An emerging masculinity, which appeared in the course of the Woman, Life, Freedom movement, and draws on classical notions of masculinity such as bravery (mardānegi) in Ferdowsi’s Shāhnāmeh
4. New forms of masculinity on social media, such as #ManWithoutNamus, that challenge honor-related violence.

Ekhraghi-ha (The Outcasts): The Role of the 'Lat' in Constructing the 'Ideal Man' of the Islamic Republic's Discourse
by Ali Papoliyazdi / UC Santa Barbara / alipapoliyazdi@ucsb.edu
This article examines the 2007 Iranian film Ekhraji-ha (The Outcasts) and its role in constructing the "ideal man" within the cultural discourse of the Islamic Republic. It argues that the film resolves a tension in post-revolutionary Iranian cinema between two competing masculine ideals: the professional, secular soldier of the Regular Army and the sacred figure of the Basiji.
The analysis begins by contextualizing this conflict, noting how early war films featuring professional soldiers were often sidelined within the official discourse due to their secular, non-ideological worldview. In contrast, the Basiji emerged as the sacred hero of the Iran-Iraq war. Yet, his portrayal was often so idealized and de-historicized that he became an abstract model for everyday masculinity in peacetime.
The paper's thesis is that Ekhraji-ha engineers a synthesis by rehabilitating the pre-revolutionary archetype of the "lat" (neighbourhood tough guy). The film neutralizes this figure, reducing his vices to harmless mischief, and positions him as raw material to be molded by the war experience. This

move allows the film to (1) create a believable, non-sacred, and traditionally masculine citizen-hero who bridges the gap between the Basiji's devotion and the soldier's earthliness; and (2) centralize the role of the mystic clergy as the essential guide who transforms this unrefined masculinity into the state's ideal figure.
The article argues that the film synthesizes a new ideal masculinity by harnessing the traditional toughness of the Lat and subordinating it to the devotional mission of the Basiji, all under the authoritative guidance of the clergy. Ekhraji-ha resolves the ideological dilemma by integrating a model of pre-revolutionary toughness into a narrative of Islamic redemption, thereby crafting a new, functional ideal form of masculinity for the Islamic Republic.

Mainstream Masculinities in 1990s Iranian Popular Cinema and Society
by Nacim Pak / University of Edinburgh / nacim.pak-shiraz@ed.ac.uk
This paper examines constructions of masculinity in popular commercial cinema of the 1990s. It focuses on two of the decade's highest-grossing films, released in 1991 and 1999, positioned at opposite ends of the decade and attracting the largest audiences of their respective years. While major works of the 1990s, such as those by Mehrjui or Kiarostami, have received considerable scholarly attention, these commercially successful films have been largely overlooked. By analysing them, this study explores how dominant and contested models of masculinity were constructed, reflected, and circulated through mainstream cinema during a decade of cultural and political transition.
Building on my previous work on constructions of masculinity in pre-revolutionary Iranian cinema and the isolation and marginalisation of men in the 2000s, this paper draws on seminal studies by Connell and Messerschmidt, Gerami's discussion of Islamic masculinities, and Peberdy's arguments on the performance of masculinity in film. It also considers how patriarchy and power structures within Iranian society are depicted and negotiated in these films.

Who is my desired man in intellectual cinema?
by Khatereh Sheibani / York University, Canada / sheibani@yorku.ca
A close investigation of the political economy of Iranian films depicts that the production, distribution, and consumption of films in Iran are deeply affected by gender relations and socio-cultural trends of gender norms. For instance, the advent of cinematography in 1900 Iran was convened by the most powerful man in Iran, Mozafar al-din Shah Qajar during his European tour. In the years to come, the thriving of commercial cinema was partly indebted to Iranian cinema's star system that portrayed the desired masculinity embodied by actors such as Fardin and Behruz Vosughi. My paper is concentrated on the representation of masculinity in the intellectual cinema to depict how art-house movies offered an alternative version of masculinity, and whether it was in line with the socio-cultural tendencies of gender norms in each time period. I study two films by Abbas Kiarostami, which sound like a two-part series or a duology: Report (1978) and Certified Copy (2010). The character of 'James Miller' in the latter film is the matured and seasoned version of 'Mamad' in the former film. In both films the camera is mostly invested in portraying male issues, insecurities, and needs. Women in both films are depicted from the male point of view. In the second film, the male character is more sensitive to female beauty and sentiments. This paper examines how notions such as sex, love, affection are understood the lead male characters. The representation of masculinity in the two films evolves, yet men in both films remain unattached, lonely, and uncertain about life and love. This paper studies the two films in their social context and provides a comparative study of each film in the context of the most applauded commercial and intellectual films in each era to understand how Kiarostami's camera viewed masculinity distinctively.

Governable Masculinities: Iranian Cinema Between Neoliberalism and State Ideology
by Mozhgan Fazli / Simon Fraser University / mozhgan_fazli@sfu.ca
This article examines how Iranian mainstream festival films construct and circulate images of masculinity, transforming male subjects into governable figures whose power aligns with state authority. Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the state has actively sought to reshape masculinity through ideals rooted in religious and political doctrine. Cultural production—like cinema—has played a pivotal role in reinforcing these representations, using narrative, aesthetics, and symbolic framing to promote dominant ideals of manhood grounded in authority, resilience, and moral duty. However, recent Iranian mainstream cinema has begun to shift this paradigm. Filmmakers now employ cinematic language to depict a more nuanced image of masculinity—one that is modern, secular-religious, egalitarian, and progressive. These reimagining challenges traditional hegemonic models and opens space for emotional vulnerability, ethical reflection, and social cooperation within male identities. By expressing values in a non-dogmatic manner, these films question the post-revolutionary definition of the moral public and blur the lines between state-institutionalized masculinity and 'state-ordained' masculinity. Yet, while diverging from official ideals, these depictions ultimately reinforce gender hierarchies and sustain the ideological foundations of the Islamic Republic within a neoliberal capitalist framework. Through an analysis of three festival films released between 2013 and 2018, I demonstrate how cinema negotiates the evolving meanings of masculinity in relation to political unrest, social injustice, and economic precarity. These films occupy a space between critique and mainstream appeal, positioning masculinity as a site where state power, neoliberal governance, and cultural imagination intersect.

Recasting Heroes: The Shāhnāmeh and Emerging Iranian Masculinities
by Karolina Rakowiecka-Asgari / Department of Iranian Studies, Institute of Oriental Studies, Jagiellonian University in Krakow / k.rakowiecka-asgari@uj.edu.pl
This paper examines how Ferdowsi's Shāhnāmeh continues to shape contemporary Iranian debates on masculinity. While epic heroes have long served as models of manhood, their reception often stands in tension with hegemonic state-sponsored masculinities of both the Pahlavi (Balslev, De Souza) and post-revolutionary (Gerami, Moallem) eras. In reshaping values such as javanmardi in today's culture, the Women, Life, Freedom movement of 2022 played a key role by creating a space for articulating newly emerging and previously marginalized, flexible masculinities (Mahdavi). Building on my previous research on reshaping traditional manhood models in the WLF movement, the paper puts this development in historical perspective. It argues that, drawing on existing ideas from literature, art, and youth culture, the movement's energy and performance created powerful imagery, advancing the process of reevaluating traditional heroes. The Shāhnāmeh's heroes, though not new to the public space, have acquired more vivid and inspiring reinterpretations. Their presence in Islamic Republic discourse has increased significantly as a result.
Engaging theories of hegemonic masculinity (Connell) and inclusive masculinities (Anderson), the analysis highlights the interplay between protective models (Johnson) and emerging caring masculinities (Elliot), demonstrating how values such as javanmardi are reinterpreted in today's culture. By tracing these dynamics, the paper shows how cultural heritage can be mobilized to challenge and expand dominant narratives of Iranian manhood.

Room 0.22

50. Cultural Psychopathology: Negotiating with Power and the Unconscious Structures of Social Order in Iran
Chair: Mahrou Zhaf
This panel examines the clinical and cultural psychodynamics of power in Iran, exploring how domination is not only imposed but psychically reproduced within the social unconscious. Moving

beyond structuralist accounts of coercion, it investigates the unconscious investments that bind individuals to structures of subjugation. Drawing on psychoanalysis and post-structuralist critique, it interrogates the psychic economy of power—how it is eroticized, internalized, and compulsively repeated through cycles of idealization, submission, and rejection.

At the core of this analysis is the sadomasochistic structure of power, where domination and submission function as interdependent psychic positions. The subject does not simply endure oppression but unconsciously participates in it by investing in omnipotent authority figures. When such figures inevitably fail to sustain projected ideals, disillusionment and aggression follow, perpetuating cycles of attachment and repudiation that inhibit the formation of autonomous subjectivity.

This sadomasochistic logic of power—at once oppressive and desired—links the familial, clinical, and institutional levels of Iranian social life. Through transference, repetition, and identification, subjects remain bound to the very structures they resist, constructing authority, submitting to it, and repudiating it in a recursive cycle.

Drawing on Frantz Fanon's critique of colonial desire and Michel Foucault's notion of power as productive, the panel situates these psychic patterns within broader cultural and historical formations, where the pursuit of legitimacy paradoxically reinforces subjugation.

Obedience and Defiance in the Consulting Room: The Politics of Authority in the Iranian Therapeutic Relationship

by Fatemeh Hosseini Ghaffari / Psychoanalytic Psychotherapist / f.h.ghafari@gmail.com

In societies where hierarchical power is deeply entrenched, the clinical relationship becomes a stage upon which authority is continuously rehearsed, negotiated, and contested. This paper examines how therapeutic practice in Iran is shaped by these embedded dynamics, producing an encounter that mirrors broader sociocultural structures of domination and defiance.

Drawing from a series of detailed case studies from private practice, this paper interrogates a recursive cycle wherein patients' unconscious investments in the therapist's authority manifest as a push-and-pull of extreme dependency and rebellious transgression. Patients frequently demand the therapist assume an omnipotent, salvific role, only to later retaliate against the very authority they have constructed. Through a Lacanian and Foucauldian framework, we argue the therapist is cast as the "subject supposed to know," a figure onto whom patients project a profound ambivalence toward power.

Within this context, therapists, caught in their own cultural conditioning and counter-transference, can unconsciously reciprocate. They may respond to patient defiance with forms of emotional punishment—using shaming interpretations, intellectual intimidation, or boundary violations that reassert control under the guise of treatment. This dynamic of provoked authority and defiant submission locks both parties into a mutually reinforcing exchange where domination is invited and then challenged, perpetuating a cycle that forecloses genuine therapeutic alliance. By exposing this unconscious economy, this paper concludes by outlining a clinical methodology for Iran that seeks to interrupt these repetitions through critical self-awareness, the strategic use of vulnerability, and a shared commitment to breaking this destructive pattern.

Intergenerational Transmission of Hierarchical Dynamics: Mothers' Emotion Socialization Practices in a Collectivist Context

by Fateme Aghaie / Research Center of Addiction and Behavioral Sciences, Non-Communicable Diseases Research Institute, Shahid Sadoughi, University of Medical Sciences, Yazd, Iran / fateme.aghaie@yahoo.com

Parents' "emotion socialization" refers to how they respond to their children's emotions within cultural frameworks. In collectivist contexts such as Iran, this often involves restricting emotional expression to prioritize group harmony, frequently through an "emotion-dismissing" style that minimizes a child's affective states.
This study, drawing on qualitative data from focus-group discussions with Iranian mothers of preschoolers, analyzes responses to children's anger. The findings reveal frequent use of punitive, comparative, and disapproving reactions that mirror cultural expectations discouraging emotional assertiveness. A common strategy was invoking fathers as figures of fear and ultimate authority, a practice that simultaneously enforces discipline and weakens the father–child bond.
Within this structure, warmth coexists with authoritarian control. Love is often expressed through caretaking rather than emotional reciprocity, cultivating obedience while foreclosing negotiation. Mothers frequently reproduce the psychological defenses they employed with their own parents, perpetuating intergenerational patterns. Consequently, children learn to communicate indirectly and normalize the endurance of emotional pain.
This presentation argues that "emotion socialization" in Iran embeds the interdependent dynamics of domination and submission into family life. By privileging harmony over conflict and obedience over authenticity, it cultivates unconscious investments in authority. Through shame and projected power, children internalize cycles of subjugation that later manifest as oscillations between control and dependence. This paper shows how the logic of power that structures Iranian institutions is first rehearsed within the home, where love and authority become inextricably linked.

The Pedagogy of Humiliation: Shame, Authority, and the Colonial Unconscious in Psychoanalytic Training in Iran

by Vajiheh Ghobadi Rad / Psychoanalytic Psychotherapist / v.qobadi.rad@gmail.com

This paper examines the institutional training of psychiatrists and psychoanalysts in Iran as a core site where the coloniality of power is psychically reproduced. We argue that the pedagogical rituals of this formation—from grand rounds in hospitals to supervision in analytic institutes—function as a theater of degradation where the trainee's "not-knowing" is weaponized to enforce a hierarchical knowledge order. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork and clinical interviews, and framed by Frantz Fanon's critique of colonial desire and Leon Wurmser's work on shame, we analyze how the trainer—whether an attending physician or a training analyst—is cast as the guardian of "authentic" Western knowledge. Applying Helen Lewis's sequence of shame, rage, guilt, and repression, we trace how this public humiliation is internalized, producing a wounded professional who, to escape this shame, often identifies with the aggressor. This pedagogical process eroticizes authority and forges a clinical identity founded on depressive compliance. The graduate of this system is then predisposed to re-enact these dynamics in the clinical dyad, occupying the role of the omnipotent "subject supposed to know" and using interpretation and status as weapons of control. The cycle thus completes itself: the humiliated trainee becomes the humiliating clinician, ensuring the system's automatic reproduction. The paper concludes by confronting the central paradox: how clinical training can decolonize its methods when its foundational structure is grounded in the narcissistic economy of shame and the recursive exchange of domination and defiance.

The Pleasure of Power: Cultural Sadomasochism and the Iranian Social Unconscious"

by Mahrou Zhaf / Assistant Professor of Gender & Sexuality Studies, St. Lawrence University / zhafm@bgsp.edu

This paper synthesizes a psychoanalytic critique to argue that the power dynamic in the psych fields of Iran is reproduced through a cultural unconscious structured by sadomasochistic logic. Moving beyond theories of top-down coercion, it explains how domination is eroticized and internalized,

binding subjects to the very hierarchies they may consciously resist.
This logic manifests as a recursive cycle of idealization and repudiation. The social subject unconsciously invests in omnipotent authority figures—the Doctor, the Father, the Master—projecting onto them a fantasy of wholeness and order. This psychic investment is an active participation in subjugation, a masochistic position that seeks legitimacy through submission. Inevitably, these figures fail to sustain the projection, leading to violent disillusionment and aggression. The subject then repudiates the authority, only to seek out a new one, perpetuating a closed circuit of domination and defiance that forecloses the development of a truly autonomous subjectivity.
Building on Frantz Fanon's analysis of colonial desire and Michel Foucault's concept of productive power, this paper situates this psychic pattern within Iran's specific historical and cultural formation. The pursuit of freedom becomes paradoxically entangled with the desire for submission, and the act of rebellion often unconsciously re-inscribes the logic of the master. This framework illuminates why opposition can feel trapped in the grammar of the system it opposes. By framing this sadomasochistic dynamic as the core of the Iranian social unconscious, this paper provides a metapsychology that links the clinical, familial, and political realms, explaining the profound tenacity of social hierarchies not just through external force, but through unconscious libidinal investment. Regarding this conceptualization, the paper proposes that by analyzing and making this recursive circuit conscious, the subject can move beyond the pleasure of domination and submission and imagine new forms of relation.

Room 1.09

51. Diasporic Revolutionary Imaginaries and Woman Life Freedom Uprising

Chair: Nader Talebi

Located at the intersection of migration studies and research on revolution/social movements, this panel explores diasporic revolutionary imaginaries associated with the Jina Revolutionary Momentum since 2022. The revolutionary imaginary, as an affectively charged semiotic ensemble, is marked above all by a rupture with the present, the extraordinary, and by a claim to transform the world. This spatio-temporal configuration links the mourning of past defeats with the dreaming of future possibilities, infused with fears and angers that inform desires, hopes, and utopias. Migration reshapes both the lives of revolutionaries and the imaginaries that sustain their struggles. Living between "here" and "there," exiled revolutionaries experience a double suspension that fuels both mourning and the reimagining of home. In the contemporary era, accelerated mobility and digital technologies have generated a new "diasporic digitality," transforming how migrants experience distance and belonging. In particular, through the real-time circulation of media and ideas, digital connectedness has intensified transnational revolutionary momentum and deepened diasporic engagement with homeland transformations.
The papers in this panel explore revolutionary imaginaries in the diasporic spaces of Women Life Freedom uprising. Bahar Oghalai explores, how revolutionary events in the country of origin, such as the Jina-uprising in Iran, affect the revolutionary imaginary of feminist activists in the diaspora and shape their subjectivities towards self-exile. Ali Niroumand's paper focuses on the temporalities of revolutionary imaginaries and its rupture against the restorative politics of Iranian nationalism in diaspora. Aryasp Delvarani sheds light on the cultural production amid revolutionary momentum and the role and transformations of diasporic Hip-hop music. Nader Talebi in his paper discusses the question of solidarity in the revolutionary imaginary and its transformations in the diasporic spaces during the revolutionary momentum and its aftermath.

Jina Revolutionary Momentum and the Question of (Transnational) Solidarity
by Nader Talebi / Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin / talebina@hu-berlin.de

This paper examines the diasporic dimensions of 2022 Jina Revolutionary Momentum and its transnational resonances, with a focus on the dynamics of solidarity. It argues that the momentum constitutes a revolutionary rupture rather than a continuation of earlier mobilizations, generating new horizons of possibility through a feminist politics of care that counters the regime's affective politics of fear. Drawing on affect theory and the concept of social imaginary, the paper investigates how the revolutionary imaginary reshaped solidarity in the Iranian diaspora and its engagement with homeland politics. By situating diasporic activism within this revolutionary momentum, the paper sheds light on how it influenced the national imaginary, fostered transnational solidarities, and redefined Kharej (abroad) from a space of exclusion to one of affection and belonging within a broader revolutionary geography. However, the revolutionary momentum that once centered on empathy, collective care, and resistance to fear was fractured by polarized political responses in its aftermath: much of the Iranian right wing groups, including monarchist factions, expressed indifference to Palestinian sufferings and the genocide in Gaza, or openly aligned with Israel excused by the Islamic Republic's support for Hamas, while parts of the Western and Iranian left, wary of the instrumentalization of "Woman, Life, Freedom" by the Israeli state, distanced themselves from the Jina revolutionary momentum. Through focusing on care politics in the revolutionary momentum and the shift from "care-full" strategies to careless alliances in the diasporic spaces in the aftermath of the revolutionary momentum, the paper explores challenges of solidarity in diaspora and its relations to the national imaginaries.

Regressive Imaginaries of Return: Iranian Nationionalim, Iranian Diaspora, and the Rupture of Woman, Life, Freedom

by Ali Niroumand / Humboldt University of Berlin (IRTG: Transformative Religion) / niroumaa@hu-berlin.de

This paper looks at the Woman, Life, Freedom revolutionary uprising through the lens of imaginaries of return, showing how temporal and spatial horizons of Iranian nationalism and diaspora converged during the movement. Since its emergence in the 19th century, Iranian nationalism has operated with an imaginary of return: temporally, envisioning a return to a lost pre-Islamic golden age; spatially, imagining a return to a "greater Iran." This spatiotemporal formation produces a regressive imaginary of return: a vision of the future predicated on the mythic recovery of the past through revolutionary action. Within this framework, revolution was imagined as the heroic removal of obstacles to the return of a glorious temporal-spatial order, done by 'great men' rescuing the motherland. This process imposed a linear temporality and an expansionist spatiality on political imagination.

In the Iranian diaspora, imaginaries of return have the same temporal-spatial pattern, envisioning a return to both a lost golden age (often the Pahlavi-era) and to the homeland itself. These imaginaries operate through a nostalgic register, structuring political desire around a temporal logic in which the present is experienced as loss, the past as a retrievable golden age, and the future as the anticipated return to an ideologically and affectively constructed horizon of national continuity and imagined harmony.

During Woman, Life, Freedom, these nationalist and diasporic imaginaries of return converged, recasting the revolutionary uprising as a patriarchal narrative of national salvation—a dynamic in which, to paraphrase Gayatri Spivak, Iranian men abroad sought to save the home and women at home from men at home, reproducing both gendered and diasporic hierarchies of agency. In contrast, the uprising was grounded in rupture, unfolding through multiplicity and openness, enacting revolutionary time and space as unfinished, contested and open to reconfiguration.

Willful Self-Exile as Feminist Resistance in the Iranian Diaspora

by Bahar Oghalai / University of Koblenz / b.oghalai92@gmail.com
This paper investigates self-exile as a deliberate act of feminist resistance among the Iranian diaspora, focusing on those based in Germany during the Jin, Jiyan, Azadî ("Women, Life, Freedom") uprising of 2022–2023. Drawing on biographical interviews and Sara Ahmed's concept of willfulness, the study explores how feminist activists chose visible, public engagement despite the risk of permanently losing the possibility of return to Iran. In reframing self-exile as a willful act, the paper conceptualizes it as both empowering and disempowering: empowering through the assertion of bodily autonomy, political consciousness, and the rejection of fear, yet disempowering through emotional loss and enduring separation from home. The research situates self-exile within the evolving dynamics between exile and diaspora, highlighting how digital platforms and transnational networks disrupt the boundaries between "inside" and "outside" Iran without fully erasing them. Through the lens of willfulness, self-exile emerges as an embodied, affective practice—a refusal of invisibility and compliance, and an insistence on political presence despite coercive structures. By situating self-exile within transnational feminist theory, this paper argues that exile should be understood not only as displacement but as a historically situated, continually reconfigured site of resistance. Ultimately, self-exile becomes a mode of feminist subject formation that, while rooted in loss and shaped by experiences of violence and displacement, transforms exile into an ongoing, embodied practice of defiance and autonomy without romanticizing its pain.

Hip-hop, Revolution and Diaspora
by Aryasp Delvarani / Humboldt university of Berlin / aryasp.delvarani@gmail.com
Musical productions had a distinctive role to play amidst the Jina revolutionary momentum in 2022 Iran. The amateur and professional productions of Iranian artists became the unofficial anthems of the revolution, contributing to revolutionary imaginaries and imaginations of future. Among all the different musical movements and genres, perhaps Hip-hop is the most particular because in almost the entirety of its history it happened outside the Islamic Republic's aesthetic regime.
Jina revolutionary momentum transformed the space and disrupted the duality or division between inside and outside Iran (Kharej/Dakhel).So people who lived thousands of kilometers afar, experienced "feelings" simultaneously, being sad on a day when so many died or being happy on a day when the possibility of revolution was more tangible. This connection was possible despite the sharp contrast in the material conditions of life inside and outside Iran, where one does not get to experience the fear of the Islamic republic apparatus of oppression every day or the joy of resisting it. The disruption of duality certainly affected Iranian Hip-hop, making it possible perhaps for the first time, that the lyrics of a song produced in France, become a revolutionary slogan in the streets of Iran. Analyzing Hip-hop through the lens of Jina revolutionary momentum, this paper explores how different localities of Iranian Hip-hop culture responded to the new revolutionary condition, and what this response tells us not only about Iranian Hip-hop, but also about the Jina Revolutionary momentum, and its associated imaginaries.

Room 1.10

52. Transfer of Knowledge in Indo-Persian Sources II

Chair: Alberto Tiburcio

This is the second panel of a cycle dedicated to the exploration of Indo-Persian sources and the way in which they incorporate elements from different cultural and linguistic spheres by way of translations, interpretations, and adaptations. In this second panel, attention is turned towards case studies in which transfer from Sanskrit sources into Persian plays a major role. The case studies hereby studied trace the Sanskrit sources behind Persian works that were produced and circulated during the Mughal period, but whose origins are traceable much earlier. The papers will consider

issues of translation and cultural adaptation across the Indic and Islamicate cultural spheres, exploring how these elements created hybrid cultural products that escape easy classifications.

First Organ of Life: Indo-Persian Medical Science on Embryogenesis
by Mohammad Golshan / PhD Student at Georg-August University of Göttingen and EHESS / mohammad.golshan@stud.uni-goettingen.de
The dissemination of Indian medical knowledge in Muslim courts through the Indo-Persian translation has been instrumental in reconceptualization of medical discourses, a paradigm shift that has been precipitated by the synthesis of Muslim physicians' medical knowledge with that of the āyurveda. Embryogenesis has scientifically and philosophically been a salient discourse within the domain of medical science texts, consistently featuring as a prominent subject in Islamic medical discourses. This notion has also been reflected in Indo-Persian medical science texts, underscoring its significance across diverse medical epistemologies. Philosophical arguments that wielded some degree of influence over prominent Muslim philosopher-physicians, such as the ongoing debates concerning the evolution of primordial organ contingent on the faculties inherent to that within the embryo, were addressed in the context of Indo-Persian medical science. The primary reflections in Indo-Persian medical texts concerning the initial organ development and faculties in embryogenesis exemplified the controversies between the concepts of embryogenesis in āyurvedic school of medicine and the Muslim physicians' medical knowledge. Although, the correlation between the faculties and the organs was reflected in general in some Indo-Persian medical texts, other Indo-Muslim physicians approached the subject in more detail and proposed their own arguments. Consequently, the present study has focused on these medical discourses with specific focus on faculties and first organ in Indo-Persian medical science texts in Northern Indian courts from the 16th to the 19th centuries.

Sanskrit Nights: The Fourth Chapter of Kalyāṇamalla's *Sulaimaccaritra* and Its Sources
by Fabio Pagliani / Cesah - EHESS / fabiomugello@gmail.com
Focusing on the fourth and final chapter of a unique sanskrit poem entitled Sulaimaccaritra (The Deeds of Solomon), composed by Kalyāṇamalla between 1517 and 1526 and dedicated to a governor of Jaunpur called Lad Khan, my paper shows firstly how the description of the character of Solomon is based both on biblical sources (I Kings) and on recurring themes in the Islamic tradition conveyed by Persian culture, such as the reference to Solomon's dominion over demons and to the Seal of Solomon; all this is integrated into a specifically Sanskrit cultural context and refers in particular to the royal model of rāmarājya (the kingship of Rāma). This same chapter (paṭala) presents what is probably the oldest existing non-Arabic version of a section of the Thousand Nights: a tale entitled The Fisherman and the Jinn with its sequel and other stories embedded in it. A possible direct source, the Persian prototype of the Thousand Nights called Hazār Afsāné is no longer existing but Persian versions of the Book of Sindbad (Sindbādnāme) which is partly included in Kalyāṇamalla's retelling, are surveyed. Also, a comparison of content with the Arabic versions allows us to examine the poet's purposes and methods in reworking these narratives, which he does while drawing on classical texts (from the epic of the Rāmāyaṇa to the short stories of the Śukasaptati) and referring to ritual practices and social conditions specific to the Indian world, as well as presenting symbolic transpositions that may shed new light on the original stories themselves and give rise to interpretative hypotheses.

The Rise and Fall of the Barmakids: Humour, Statecraft, and Memory in a Forgotten Indo-Persian Manuscript
Arezou Azad

Room 1.11

53. Persian literature of the early Ilkhanate: stories of rebellion and poems of decline

Chair: Stefan Kamola

This panel explores literature and literary historiography produced in the latter thirteenth century, as the Mongols consolidated control over the Iranian world. The four papers consider familiar historical works, unfamiliar works by familiar historians, and works that have never been studied before. The aim is to appreciate how literary techniques and patterning were used to make sense of life in the wake of Mongol conquest and rule.

The first paper revisits a series of episodes from the Mongol conquest of Iran found in the Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī of Jūzjānī, written around 1260 from the relative safety of Delhi. Rather than simply being the imaginings of a bitter scholar-bureaucrat lamenting the Mongol conquest, they were products of a complex rhetorical campaign perpetrated by the Mongols themselves. This compels us to reconsider Jūzjānī's moralizing stance against the Mongols as a reflection of their self-representation. The second paper offers a close reading of parallel narratives of rebellion in two Persian chronicles prepared at the Mongol court. Since Vaṣṣāf, the author of the latter chronicle, actively modelled his work on that of Juvaynī, the similarities between these episodes must be assessed not just as possible parallel responses to Mongol invasion, but as conscious literary echoing. This should invite us to rethink how we accept the historical truth of chronicle episodes more broadly.

The third paper stays with Vaṣṣāf, but turns away from his famous historical chronicle to instead look at one example of the kind of descriptive poetry (vaṣf) from which he earned his penname. While not directly concerned with the Mongol conquest, the Bahārnāma betrays a deep pessimism about the state of the world, shedding light not only on Vaṣṣāf's formation as a writer, but on his vision of the world before he wrote his chronicle. The final paper takes up three astrological works that present Chinggis Khan within a cyclical model of history built around the patterned movements of celestial bodies. Each of these texts was prepared in an area under Ilkhanid influence but far from the court itself. Thus, they offer a liminal perspective on the conquest, unbeholden to Mongol patronage with its expectations and obligations. They also provide examples of how scientific knowledge might be applied to historical narrative.

Jūzjānī and his Mongol Sources. On Some Mongol Narratives from the Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī

by Simon Berger / CNRS / INaLCO / simon.berger1809@gmail.com

The rise and rule of the Mongols are surrounded by countless legends and stories that spread across Eurasia through conquerors, refugees, merchants, and ambassadors. In the section of his Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī devoted to the Mongol invasions, Jūzjānī reflects some of these stories, particularly those about Chinggis Khan and his descendants. Although Jūzjānī himself fled the Mongol conquest and wrote from within the anti-Mongol court of Delhi, he generally uses these stories, scattered throughout his narrative, to reinforce the dark image of the Mongol rulers, or conversely, to highlight some rare positive elements. While these stories were long perceived as fictitious or as distortions under the pen of a biased author, it now appears that they were originally the result of propaganda skilfully orchestrated by the Mongol authorities themselves. As such, they are less indicative of historical 'facts' than of the representations the Mongols elites wished to project about themselves and their reception.

Astrological visions of Chinggis Khan from the margins of the Ilkhanate

by Stefan Kamola / Austrian Academy of Sciences / stefan.kamola@oeaw.ac.at

Narratives of the life and career of Chinggis Khan are typically based on sources drawing on Mongolian historical tradition, including the works of Rashid al-Din and Juvayni in Persian, the Secret History of the Mongols in Mongolian, and the Campaigns of Chinggis Khan and the History of the

Yuan in Chinese. Sources from outside the Mongol world, such as reports of diplomats to the Mongol court, are often considered too far removed from the experience of Mongol conquest and rule to provide accurate insight into Chinggis Khan's life. This paper examines a series of peripheral texts prepared around the edges of the Ilkhanate that offer horoscopes and descriptions of Chinggis Khan. From them, we read an ambivalence about the nature of the Mongols and their role in the unfolding history of the region.
In Shiraz and in Anatolia, authors produced parallel updates to a Zoroastrian apocalyptic tradition that dates back at least to the early Abbasid period. While these are both reflections of the impulse to make sense of the Mongol conquest in the longue durée of human history, they reach different conclusions about the role of the Mongols in that story. The third text featured in this talk applies a series of astrological cycles to interpret large-scale patterns of history, from the moments of turbulence in early Islamic history to the historical landmarks of the Ilkhanate. While the main figure of this text is an unnamed leader from the Ilkhanid military elite in the south of Iran, the text also comments on the nature of Mongol rule more broadly through its choice of what celestial phenomena to feature and how. Through these texts, we see examples of how the heavens might be deployed to explain otherwise inexplicable events on earth.

Religious Revolt in the Mongol Empire: The Cases of Maḥmūd Tārābī and Sharaf al-Dīn Ibrāhīm
by Tobias Jones / Oriental Institute, Czech Academy of Sciences / jones@orient.cas.cz
We are provided with two parallel accounts of local religious rebellions against Mongol rule in the Persianate world in the histories of ʿAṭā Malik Juvainī and his continuator Vaṣṣāf. Juvainī describes the rebellion of a Sufi leader Maḥmūd Tārābī in Bukhara in the 1230s, while Vaṣṣāf recounts the coming of a sayyid known as Sharaf al-Dīn Ibrāhīm to Shiraz with a large army in 1265.
These two tales share similar features, and Vaṣṣāf himself openly acknowledges how similar the event he describes is to that of Tārābī. In these stories, we can see how Juvainī and Vaṣṣāf framed both popular religious sentiment and the Mongol responses to these rebellions. It will be shown that there are clear differences in the tone of the two historians, despite the overarching thematic continuity in the accounts.

Spring and Upheaval: Politics and Poetic Voice in Vaṣṣāf's Bahārnāma
by Sara Mirahmadi / Austrian Academy of Sciences / sara.mirahmadi@oeaw.ac.at
This paper examines Bahārnāma, a lesser-known poetic composition by ʿAbdallāh Vaṣṣāf al-Ḥażrat, composed during his early career in Shiraz, prior to his entry into Ilkhanid service. Dedicated to the local patron Ṣadr al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Khālidī al-Zanjānī, the work stands at the intersection of literary elegance and political commentary. While its surface structure follows the conventions of seasonal praise poetry, Bahārnāma departs from courtly norms by incorporating sharp observations on the sociopolitical turmoil in early 14th-century Fars.
The paper explores how Vaṣṣāf, in this early phase of his career, mobilizes the genre of descriptive spring poetry to articulate a vision of disorder and decline, positioning his poetic voice within a broader discourse of moral and political critique. In doing so, he demonstrates a capacity for rhetorical performance that anticipates his later historiographical persona. The composition reflects not only his literary ambitions, but also his engagement with regional networks of patronage and authority in a period marked by fragmentation and uncertainty.
Drawing on manuscript sources, particularly Aya Sofya 2620/5 and University of Tehran F-112/5, the analysis also considers the textual transmission and formal features of Bahārnāma, including its structure, imagery, and use of poetic conventions. The paper argues that the work offers a valuable lens through which to trace Vaṣṣāf's development as a writer and his negotiation of the expectations placed on poets operating in provincial courts. More broadly, it contributes to a reassessment of the

political function of poetry in early 14th-century Iran, and to our understanding of how authors like Vaṣṣāf used literary form to reflect—and intervene in—the dynamics of their time.

Room 1.15

54. Dimensions of the Iran-Iraq War and Its Extensions: Bottom-up Perspectives on Unintended Consequences of Strategic Decisions and Encounters

Chair: Yasuyuki Matsunaga

We will put together three papers that deal with different strategic phases of the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) and its extensions, such as the 1990-1991 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and Persian Gulf War. For data, we rely on various sources including historical documents (governmental and non-governmental), transcripts of speeches, periodicals including newspapers and other domestic publications, as well as oral history interviews and other anthropological investigations conducted by the authors. We employ a contingent conjunction approach to historical explanation and aim to foreground unintended consequences of strategic decisions and encounters in fully contextualized manners. We also aim to incorporate bottom-up, local perspectives in addition to centralized leadership decisions and their consequences within the context of historic international environments. Overall, we aim to fill gaps in the current historiography of the Iran-Iraq War and its extensions by connecting hitherto unconnected dots and unearthing voices that have not adequately been heard as yet.

Khorrmashahr, Khomeini, and His Forever War

by Mateo Mohammad Farzaneh / Professor and Chair of the Department of History at Northeastern Illinois University and Managing Editor of the Encyclopaedia Iranica. / m-farzaneh@neiu.edu

This paper examines the reasons as to why Ayatollah Khomeini did not encourage his war commanders to end the Iran-Iraq War when it was most advantageous to Iran. The Ayatollah's rejection of Saddam's offer for a ceasefire and Iran's expansion of the war inside Iraqi territory after the liberation of Khorramshahr in May 1982 allowed for the war to continue for 6 more years, which consequently resulted in massive human and financial loss for both sides. It also allowed Iraq to increase its military power when it received key support from Arab and western states who wanted to prevent an Iranian win. In recent years, the discussion of a possible deletion of a sentence from Khomeini's message of congratulations to the troops for successfully dislodging the invading army from Iranian territory after 18 months of occupation indicating the end of the war has started speculation about a conspiracy to continue the war for various reasons.

By examining Khomeini's speeches from the beginning of the war until December 1984 this paper argues that Khomeini never intended to end the war due to his interpretation of Quranic commands that calls for forever wars until there is no sign of oppression on earth referring to Al-Anfal: 39. Hence, he did not encourage his men to end the war in 1982 when it seemed it was a rational step. But the possible deletion of that sentence was exactly what the Revolutionary Guards Corp commanders wanted but their reason for wanting to continue the war was mostly hubris and ideological. In addition to examining Khomeini's speeches, official bulletins issued by his office, correspondence between him and political and military personalities, recorded interviews of military commanders in addition to the Quran and the Prophetic Tradition that together establish the thesis of this paper will be analyzed.

Revisiting the 1988 Halabja Attack: How the Activities of the Qarargah Ramazan Inadvertently Helped to Cause It

by Yasuyuki Matsunaga / Tokyo University of Foreign Studies / matsunaga@tufs.ac.jp

This paper examines how Iran's military strategy and activities involving exiled Iraqi Kurds toward the end of the war unexpectedly contributed to the Iraqi government's decision to attack Halabja with

chemical weapons in March 1988. I will use oral history interviews with those who had first-hand experiences with dealing with the IRGC personnels and the attack itself which I have conducted in Iraqi Kurdistan in 2025 as well as other historical documents (governmental and non-governmental), transcripts of speeches, periodicals including newspapers and other domestic publications. I will also draw on IRGC-related publications aimed for the veterans and their families as well as the military semi-official historiography. One key focus will be the activities and strategic decisions surrounding the Qarargah-e Ramadan which was in charge of organizing exiled Iraqis and embedding them in Iran's warfront activities. This paper contributes to the historiography of the 1988 Halabja chemical attack by adding the pre-attack Iranian involvements, including the IRGC occupation of the town itself, which have usually been completely dropped in the existing accounts.

Beyond the Trigger: Iraqi Soldiers, Civilian Networks, and the Unfolding of the 1991 Uprising
by Amir Taha / University of Amsterdam / taha.amir@live.nl
This paper investigates the 1991 Iraqi uprising through the eyes of ordinary Iraqi soldiers deployed during the Gulf War, challenging the prevalent narrative that their return directly triggered the revolt. It argues that while mass desertion and dissent within the army critically weakened the Iraqi government, the soldiers' capacity for direct mobilization in Basra was shaped and influenced by the city's highly localized solidarity networks. The analysis draws on historical reconstruction of the war's three phases—combat, withdrawal, and uprising—to demonstrate how elite divisions and miserable frontline conditions fostered anti-government sentiments among soldiers, that intersected with wider regional political developments and the soldier's own political experiences with the Saddam government and the Iran-Iraq war since 1980. The analysis, drawing on interviews with former Iraqi soldiers and civilians from Basra and southern Iraq, Baath Party and Iraqi state records, and English and Arabic scholarly literature, reconstructs the war's three phases—combat, withdrawal, and uprising.
Upon their chaotic withdrawal from Kuwait on February 25 1991, these soldiers entered a Basra where the uprising was already emerging from within specific civilian ecologies. The paper's central contention is that the army, as an institution, remained a pillar of the state and did not join the rebellion. This, combined with the strong localism of Basra's networks, created a complex zone of dissent for non-local soldiers seeking to join the uprising. Consequently, the soldiers' significant impact was not as a unified revolutionary force—even though individualized acts of defiance by soldiers did play a role—but through acts of demobilization and support such as discarding uniforms and diverting needed weapons to the revolutionaries of Basra. Ultimately, this study reveals the complex interplay between military dissent and civilian mobilization, showing that pre-existing local solidarities were key to mobilize shared national grievances.

Room 1.16

55. Persian Manuscripts under the Microscope: Problems of Identification, Transmission, and Interpretation

Chair: Shiva Mihan, Maria Subtelny

The panel will focus on the following issues connected with the study of Persian manuscripts dating from the Timurid, Ottoman, and Safavid periods: the challenge of the unique manuscript; the problem of authorial recensions of well-known works; the interpretation of marginal notations and designs; and the dating of manuscripts of a confessional nature. The first paper will examine the earliest known Persian translation of the pseudo-Aristotelian Arabic mirror for princes Kitāb al-siyāsa fī tadbīr al-riyāsa, better known as Sirr al-asrār, that was listed in the inventory of the Ottoman Palace Library. It will assess the quality of the translation and attempt to identify its author, audience, and subsequent ownership. The second paper will trace the various recensions of the Persian chronicle Zubdat al-tawārīkh, composed by the historian Ḥāfiẓ Abrū for the Timurid prince Bāysunghur, with a

view to explaining the discrepancies that emerged in the process of its rewriting by the author. The third paper will reevaluate the significance of marginal designs in Safavid illustrated manuscripts, suggesting that they served as a visual response to both the texts and paintings that they frame. The fourth paper will reexamine the dating of an illustrated manuscript commissioned by the Safavid ruler Shāh Ismāʿīl of the Aḥsan al-kibār, a history of the lives of the Shiʿite imams originally composed in the early fourteenth century, by taking into account its confessional context and possible polemical intent.

The Problem of the Unicum: A Manuscript of the Persian Translation of the Pseudo-Aristotelian Kitāb al-siyāsa fī tadbīr al-riyāsa, known as Sirr al-asrār, from the Ottoman Palace Library
by Maria Subtelny / University of Toronto / m.subtelny@utoronto.ca
The Sirr al-asrār (The secret of secrets) purports to be the advices of the Greek philosopher Aristotle to his pupil and world conqueror, Alexander the Great, on a wide range of issues relating to kingship, administration of the state, and the conduct of war. Composed originally in Arabic and dated to tenth-century Iraq, it had an outstanding career both in the Islamic world and in Europe where its Latin translations as Secretum secretorum were subsequently translated into virtually every European language and found in the libraries of kings, princes, and ecclesiastical authorities. Manuscript copies of the Arabic Sirr al-asrār were likewise made for Muslim potentates, among them the Zangid ruler of Mosul, the Timurid prince Baysunghur, and several Mamluk sultans and amirs. Although many Arabic works had been translated into Persian early on, no complete Persian translation of the Sirr al-asrār is known to exist apart from a single manuscript copy listed in the inventory of the Topkapi Palace Library (compiled in 908–9/1502–4) and now housed in the Istanbul University Rare Book Library. The manuscript is not dated and as a unicum presents problems of interpretation, some of which can be resolved with recourse to the Arabic manuscripts. However, unlike most manscripts of the Arabic original, it contains an introduction by the anonymous translator who states that he translated the work expressly for a group he refers to as ikhwān al-ṣafā wa khullān al-wafā (the brethren of purity and the companions of loyalty), an allusion to the secretive tenth-century Neoplatonist fraternity that produced a series of Arabic treatises of encyclopaedic scope. The paper will analyze various features of the Persian manuscript (seals, fly-leaf inscriptions, paleography, etc.) that may provide clues to the impetus behind the translation in the context of fifteenth-century Ottoman court culture.

Marginal Designs as Liminal Bodies in the "World" of the Persian Illustrated Manuscript
by Michael Chagnon / Curator, Aga Khan Museum; Assistant Professor (status-only), Departments of Art History and Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations, University of Toronto / michael.chagnon@akdn.org
This paper examines the significance of marginal designs in Persian literary manuscripts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Previously the subject of little systematic study, the role of such designs has attracted increased attention from historians of Persian art in the past decade. Recent scholarship has considered the extent to which marginal designs were created as formal responses to or interpretive commentaries on the textual and pictorial contents of the central field (matn), and has probed the potential role of decorated margins as physical-conceptual frames that gesture toward the metaphysical.
The designs examined in this paper are primarily vegetal and figural motifs that recur within and sometimes across individual manuscripts, and therefore appear generic. They are executed in a range of techniques, including gold—and occasionally silver—painting, as well as non-painterly methods such as stenciling. Though pictorial, these designs invert the conventional relationship between figure and ground, thereby complicating established definitions of depiction.

This paper contributes to the ongoing discussion by relating the forms, materials, and optical effects of these marginal designs to descriptions of bodies in ʻālam al-mithāl (the World of Image), a liminal cosmological realm described by late thirteenth-century philosophers and elaborated upon by writers of the Safavid period. I argue that this correspondence helps clarify the function of marginal designs as hermeneutic frames for the matn and as ontological counterpoints to writing and painting.

A 'period's Eye': An Early Safavid Manuscript of Aḥsan al-kibār and its Paintings
by Ruba Kana'an / University of Toronto / ruba.kanaan@utoronto.ca
This paper examines the early sixteenth century illustrated manuscript of the lives of the Twelve Shiʻa Imams entitled Aḥsan al-kibār fī maʻrifat aʼimmat al-athār (National Library of Russia in St. Petersburg. Dorn 312 and Dorn 313). The manuscript is a sixteenth century copy of a 739/1338 work by a member of an important Shi'ite family in Varamin. Its association with the early reign of Shah Tahmasb is based on an inscription on one of the 39 paintings in the manuscript. The painted inscription bears the name of the shah, the date of 932/1526, and the signature of the Qasim ibn ʻAli, a painter who trained in the court of Sultan Husayn Bayqara (d. 1506) and the scriptorium of Ali Shir Navaʼi (d. 1501) in Herat. The manuscript and its copies received some scholarly attention with the focus understandably being the signed and dated painting. The First Sermon of Hasan Ibn ʻAli (Folio 373b) was exhibited in Hunt for Paradise (2003) and le Chant du monde (2007) and have since been used as an example of the rise of pictorial representations of piety in the early Safavid period.
The paper proposes a new date of 927/1521 for the manuscript based on the calligrapher who signed Dorn 312 and another manuscript copy of Aḥsan al-kibār now in the collection of the Malek National Museum and Library in Tehran (4159) dated to 948/1542. This date provides an opportunity to re-examine the context of its commissioning during the reign of Shah Ismaʻil and its completion with the addition of the paintings under the young Shah Tahmasb. The paper also explores the didactic nature of the manuscript's painting program in comparison to the only other illustrated 16th century copy of Aḥsan al-kibār dated to 988/1581 (Gulistan Palace, 2252). By so doing, Shah Tahmasb's Aḥsan al-kibār provides a 'period's eye' that sheds new light on the highly polemical context of the early Safavid period.

Timurid Historiography: Ḥāfiẓ Abrū and the Chronicles of Bāysunghur
by Shiva Mihan / British Museum / shiva.mihan@gmail.com
This paper examines the manuscripts of the Zubdat al-Tawārīkh (The Quintessence of Chronicles) produced for the Timurid prince Bāysunghur (1397–1433) in Herat. The focus of his corpus was predominantly on history and literature, and a good number of history texts were composed or copied at his royal library. One of the most significant sources of Timurid history was a chronicle composed by the well-known court historian Ḥāfiẓ Abrū (d. 1427) between 1423 and 1427, on the orders of the prince. A central figure in Timurid historiography, Ḥāfiẓ Abrū was notable for his persistent habit of reworking his own material, even in texts that were ostensibly newly composed. The Zubdat al-Tawārīkh, composed in four volumes, offers an especially revealing case, showing how earlier writings were continuously reframed, condensed, and repurposed within what appeared to be fresh compilations. Through textual comparison, and by tracing such variations in the extant manuscripts (Cambridge University Library, Browne Or. Ms. G. 9; and Institute for Oriental Studies of St. Petersburg, Dorn 268), this paper highlights the discrepancies that emerged across these two versions, and considers the extent to which Ḥāfiẓ Abrū shaped his histories through ongoing processes of adaptation and re-composition.

Room 1.17

56. Idols, Lovers, and Manuscripts: Reassessing the Early Persian Romance Tradition

Chair: Kristof Szitar

This panel examines the early Persian narrative poem (mathnawī) as a literary form that developed in dialogue with diverse cultural, linguistic, and religious traditions. Bringing together four studies grounded in both printed and manuscript sources, the panel revisits key but understudied texts—ʿUnṣurī's Vāmiq u ʿAzrā and White Idol, Red Idol, ʿAyyūqī's Varqa u Gulshāh, the Humāynāma, and Alfiyya u Shalfiyya—to illuminate the aesthetic, rhetorical, and transcultural dimensions of early Persian romance. Collectively, the papers interrogate how these texts engaged with non-Islamic, Arabic, Hellenistic, Indic, and regional traditions, how they constructed gender and sexuality, and how they negotiated literary form and innovation. The first study reconsiders ʿUnṣurī's narrative poetry in light of his engagement with "idolatrous" and non-Islamic source materials, situating his work within Ghaznavid intellectual culture and the broader frontier of Islam. The second paper offers a detailed analysis of paronomasia (tajnīs) in ʿAyyūqī's Varqa u Gulshāh, reevaluating the poet's technical sophistication and his position within the pantheon of Persian poets. The third paper examines the Humāynāma, a unique mathnawī preserved in a single manuscript, exploring the interplay of metrical form and narrative content through comparative analysis. The last study investigates the Alfiyya u Shalfiyya, a pornographic poem that articulates complex notions of gender, masculinity, and female agency within an intertextual Persianate and transregional framework. By juxtaposing granular philological inquiry with broader literary-historical perspectives, this panel proposes a new understanding of the early Persian mathnawī as a dynamic, cross-cultural genre—one that not only reflects but actively shapes the multilingual and multi-religious worlds of the medieval Persianate sphere.

How to Be a Non-Man? Constructions of Masculinity and Gender in the Pornographic Mathnawī Alfiyya u Shalfiyya

by Kristof Szitar / Université de Lausanne. / kristof.szitar@unil.ch

This study examines the articulation of gender and sexual roles in a recently discovered, unique versified manuscript of Alfiyya u Shalfiyya, a pornographic mathnawī composed in the mutaqārib meter. To anchor this text within its broader intellectual and literary context, the first section establishes intertextual connections with Indic (predominantly Sanskrit) and Arabic traditions of ʿilm al-bāh ("the science of intercourse"), as well as with the Persian advice literature, particularly the eleventh-century Qābūsnāma. The analysis draws upon both digital and physical examinations of this incomplete manuscript, whose surviving folios—with deliberate blank spaces—indicate that it was intended to be illuminated. The poem's central figures—a mother and daughter pair—are considered within the framework of early Persian narrative poetry, supporting the argument that feminine protagonists in such texts often possess distinctive narrative and sexual agency (as also seen in Vāmiq u ʿAzrā, Gulshāh u Varqa, and Humāynāma). Through the two heroines' encounters with various interlocutors, Alfiyya u Shalfiyya offers a rich terrain for interrogating premodern Persian notions of promiscuity, potency, gender identity, and related conceptualizations of masculinity and non-manliness.

An early Persian verse narrative in mutaqārib - the Humāynāma

by Gabrielle Van den Berg / Leiden University / g.r.van.den.berg@hum.leidenuniv.nl

The Humāynāma is one of the least studied early Persian verse narratives, composed in the metre mutaqārib. It is a mathnawī on the topic of the love between prince Humāy from Egypt and princess Gul from Syria, and hence might be characterized as a romantic mathnawī. The work is only available in a single manuscript copy, which has a reference to the year 712/1313. In this paper I would like to briefly discuss this manuscript and the narrative it contains, focusing on its structure; I would also like

to explore how this mathnawī relates to comparable mathnawīs, specifically mathnawīs in mutaqārib.

Paronomasia in the Narrative Poem of ʿAyyūqī: Stylistic Reflections and Reconsiderations
by Dario Mazzocchi / Ca' Foscari University of Venice / 878461@stud.unive.it
Varqa u Gulshāh is a mathnawī composed in the 5th/11th century. Scholars of Persian literature (Melikian-Chirvani 1970; Khaleqi Motlaq 1987) have generally agreed that its author, ʿAyyūqī, lacked both elegance and technical skill, suggesting a limited degree of erudition and consequently positioning him as a minor poet. The present study seeks to examine one of the most significant rhetorical devices in Persian poetry—i.e., tajnīs (paronomasia)—and its deployment in ʿAyyūqī's poem. The analysis considers its occurrences in light of both classical (particularly, Rādūyānī 1949; Waṭwāṭ 1929) and contemporary (Homāʾī 1354/1975;Tajlil 1367/1988-1989; Šamisā 1368/1989) treatises on tajnīs. In doing so, the paper explores the poem's structure, observing its strengths and weaknesses as reflected in the use of this rhetorical figure, and assessing the degree of expertise demonstrated in constructing the rhetorical texture of the work at the dawn of Persian narrative poetry. The aim is to attain a more nuanced understanding of ʿAyyūqī's stylistic features through the systematic analysis of relevant data, thereby enabling a more precise situating of his work within its historical and literary contexts.
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ʿUnṣurī at the Border: Reappraising His Project as a Writer of Romance
by Cameron Cross / University of Michigan, Ann Arbor / kchalipa@umich.edu
While Abu'l-Qāsim ʿUnṣurī has been justly remembered as one of the great masters of panegyric verse in the early history of New Persian poetry, this paper turns our attention to another and perhaps less prominent side of his work: his three narrative poems. Although they now only exist in fragmentary form, there is sufficient data to suggest that ʿUnṣurī was not only a significant innovator in this field — perhaps playing a far more impactful role in the elevation of romance as a court genre than we realize — but that his masnavis comprise a project distinctly keyed to the cultural and political environment of Ghanzi during the reign of Sultan Maḥmūd (r. 998–1030 CE). Part of what makes this project so distinctive is its sustained interest in what ʿUnṣurī would likely have called 'pagan' (jāhilī) storyworlds: his Vāmiq & ʿAzrā is clearly adapted from an ancient Greek source, while his White Idol, Red Idol seems to draw from regional legends about the great Buddhas of Bamiyan. This interest puts him in close company with his contemporary Abu'l-Rayḥān Bīrūnī, a scientist at Maḥmūd's court who also conducted detailed inquiries into the ritual practices, calendrical

reckonings, and metaphysics of non-Abrahamic religious traditions; he even translated the same stories that ʿUnṣurī worked with into Arabic. By rereading the fragments of ʿUnṣurī's narrative poems in dialogue with Bīrūnī and other intellectuals at the Ghazanvid court, this study situates his masnavis in their broader context, asking what it meant to write romances, culled from non-Islamic source materials, on the frontiers of Islam itself.

Room 1.18

57. Shahnameh Beyond Borders

Chair: Noonik Darbinian

The Shahnameh of Ferdowsi, completed in the early eleventh century, has long been celebrated as a cornerstone of Persian cultural identity and literary heritage. Yet the Shahnameh is not confined within the boundaries of Iran: it has traveled across languages, geographies, and traditions, shaping and reshaping itself in diverse contexts. This panel, Shahnameh Beyond Borders, seeks to explore the transcultural trajectories of the epic—from its written and oral traditions in the Iranian world to its modern receptions in Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and beyond. By examining translation, adaptation, artistic visualization, and political appropriation, written and oral transmission among Iranian-speaking neighbors and their historical neighbors. The panel aims to highlight the Shahnameh as a dynamic text that continually negotiates between local rootedness and global circulation.

On Kurdish Narratives of Rostam Zal

by Tereza Amryan / Yerevan State University / amryantereza@ysu.am

Narratives about Rostam, the son of Zal, are widely cherished in Kurdish folklore. These stories have been orally transmitted across generations and remain an important part of Kurdish cultural heritage. These stories have been transmitted orally through generations, often recited, sung, or narrated in both verse and prose forms. Within the Kurdish tradition, such narratives are commonly referred to as çîrok or hikyat. Throughout the twentieth century, these tales attracted scholarly interest from philologists, ethnographers, and Orientalists. In particular, Kurdish intellectuals in the Soviet Union undertook efforts to document and publish folk tales, among which stories about Rostam Zal were notably prevalent. Despite this attention, the Kurdish literary tradition lacks a figure comparable to Ferdowsi, who compiled these narratives into a comprehensive epic. However, during the 1930s in Soviet Armenia, Kurdish writer Hajie Jndi (Hecîyê Cindî) undertook a significant project to collect and transcribe Rostam Zal stories from Yezidi and Kurdish informants, as well as Armenians proficient in Kurdish who preserved these tales orally. Jndi observed that many informants were illiterate, preserving these tales solely through oral tradition.

Jndi’s compilation comprises twenty-four narratives encompassing various phases of Rostam's life, including his birth, childhood, and adolescence; his role as protector of the impoverished; his relationships with his sons; and his struggles for his homeland culminating in his death. Analyzing these Kurdish tales provides insight into both the similarities and divergences between them and the accounts found in the Shahnameh. Furthermore, such study reveals evolving Kurdish perspectives and interpretations of Rostam Zal’s legend over time.

Studying these Kurdish versions of Rostam Zal’s tales offers valuable insights into both their similarities and differences with the Shahnameh and the changing Kurdish perspectives on these enduring legends.

Armenian versions of "Shahnameh"

by Arpine Arushanyan / 2011–Present — LecturerSubjects: Radical Shiʿi Movements; History of Iranian Religions, Iranian EthnographyEmployer: Yerevan State University (YSU), Faculty of Oriental Studies, Department of Iranian Studies, Aleq Manukyan 1, Yerevan,

Armeniahttp://www.ysu.am/site/2010–2011 — EditorIran and the Caucasus, Brill, Leidenhttps://brill.com/view/journals/ic/ic-overview.xml / arpine.arushanyan@ysu.am
Since the eleventh century, Armenian versions of Ferdowsi's "Shahnameh" have enjoyed remarkable popularity in Armenia. Although these versions are not complete translations of the Persian original, they represent an "anthology" of the Iranian epic adapted to Armenian cultural needs, worldview, and folklore aesthetics. Armenian storytellers focused primarily on Rustam—the central hero of the "Shahnameh"—and on figures such as Siyavash, Bijan and Manijeh, and Borzu. While recognizing Rustam as a foreign hero, Armenians embraced his courage, honesty, and sense of justice as qualities deeply resonant with their own moral ideals. Thus, the Armenian narratives are not simple reproductions of Ferdowsi's work but independent retellings of selected episodes, blending Iranian motifs with local Armenian traditions.
Building on this foundation, the present paper explores the intersections between the Iranian "Shahnameh" and the Armenian national epic "Sasna cŕer" (The Daredevils of Sassoun). Both epics, though rooted in distinct linguistic and cultural spheres, emerge from a shared mythopoetic environment shaped by centuries of Iranian–Armenian interaction—political, religious, and imaginative. Through comparative textual and cultural analysis, the study examines how Armenian adaptations of the Shahnameh mediated Iranian concepts of kingship, divine justice, and cosmic order, reinterpreting them through Armenian moral and social frameworks. Likewise, "Sasna cŕer" reflects a heroic ethos parallel to Persian epic traditions while preserving indigenous oral patterns of collective resistance.
The paper argues that Armenian "Shahnameh" adaptations and "Sasna cŕer" together constitute a transregional epic continuum in which myth and history converge to construct collective memory and identity. By tracing these intercultural correspondences, the study illuminates how epic narratives functioned as vehicles of shared moral imagination, shaping enduring perceptions of heroism, legitimacy, and spiritual sovereignty in both Armenian and Iranian literary consciousness.

"Reinterpreting the Shahnameh in the Contemporary Global Political and Cultural Sphere"
by Noonik Darbinian / Yerevan State University / noonik.darbinyan@ysu.am
Ferdowsi's Shahnameh, an epic masterpiece of Persian literature, has transcended its cultural origins to shape global literary and artistic landscapes. Modern receptions of the Shahnameh encompass a diverse range of interpretations, including translations into numerous languages, innovative adaptations in theater, film, and the visual arts, as well as extensive scholarly analyses of its mythological and historical dimensions. These engagements highlight a revitalized appreciation for Persian heritage, fostering meaningful cross-cultural dialogues and inspiring creative and academic endeavors worldwide.
This paper seeks to examine the multifaceted ways in which the Shahnameh continues to resonate in contemporary political and cultural contexts, with a particular focus on its modern adaptations, reinterpretations, and visual representations. By examining these evolving manifestations, the study highlights the Shahnameh's enduring legacy and its continued relevance in shaping contemporary global discourse. It explores how Shahnameh participates in current political and cultural narratives, reflecting ongoing negotiations of power, nationalism, and global cultural memory.

Naqqāli, narrating or acting?
by Mohammadali Mirzaee Jadideslami / doctoral candidate in Iranian studies at Hamburg University / pendar.mirzaee1370@gmail.com
Bahram Beyzaei identifies the naqqāl as an actor who embodies every character of a story alone. In line with Eric Bentley's definition of theatre—"A impersonates B while C looks on"—naqqāli itself can be considered theatre, and the naqqāl's performance, a form of acting. Still, a fundamental question

emerges: can the naqqāl's actions be aligned with principles established by major theatre figures such as Stanislavski, Michael Chekhov, or Grotowski? And if alignment exists, does this justify calling the practice "acting"?
To answer, a precise analysis is necessary. First, naqqāli must be examined in its earlier form, when it was closer to the act of narrating. Second, recent elements—innovations within the tradition—must be identified in order to trace their sources, evaluate their impact, and measure their integration. Only then can one assess whether this transformed version of naqqāli has merged with theatrical models, or instead taken an alternative path requiring a new classification.
In 20th-century Iran, Western theatre significantly influenced naqqāli. These influences shaped performance length, rhythm, suspense, vocal expression, and character building. Singing, costume design, and modern literature also contributed to its development. This study therefore positions naqqāli between narrating and acting, aiming to define the skills essential for the naqqāli.

Room 2.17

58. Connectivity and Mobility in the Premodern Iranian World

Chair: Olga M. Davidson, Ilex Project

The Iranian world in the late antique and medieval period was awash with change. Echoes of this novel historical context reverberated well into the Islamic period, as they molded the templates which transported an allegedly pre-Islamic past into the Abbasid cultural and political landscape. Furthermore, the templates themselves rested heavily on fusion, with narratives featuring itinerant scholars and their baggage of borrowed or even pilfered texts traversing borders and languages. Lasting change and deep-seated currents, however, are best evident at the granular level, as argued by the papers in this panel. The focus of the first paper is on the Book Pahlavi corpus—the group of Middle Persian texts largely authored by Zoroastrian priests—that transmitted Sasanian materials to Abbasid scholars. Rather than preserving a repository of a bygone era, the paper finds that the authors of the Book Pahlavi corpus were as much vested in adapting the Sasanian material to the new ideational context of the early Islamic era as were the Abbasid scholars who mined the corpus for traces of the past. Reactive transmission is also the subject of the second paper that studies a unique witness to the Arabic reception of the myth of the Trojan War in an eleventh century mirror for princes. The account in this Arabic anthology exemplifies the virtues of tadbīr, and the purchase of deception and manipulation in navigating troubled waters. The third paper, a joint presentation by our two last panelists, is a comparatist reading of the 'Life of Homer' and 'Life of Ferdowsi' narratives as reception histories that can serve as windows unto a worldview, avoiding the pitfall of the rigid demarcation between history and myth that has proved hitherto stultifying in works of scholarship on Shāhnāma and on Homeric poetry.

Achilles, Hector and the Wooden Horse in Rayy: The Account of the Siege of Troy in al-Ḫaṭīb al-Iskāfī's Luṭf al-tadbīr

by Marianna Zarantonello / Department of Oriental and Islamic Studies, University of Tübingen / marianna.zarantonello@uni-tuebingen.de

The myth of the Trojan War has enjoyed a remarkable afterlife, reverberating far beyond the Mediterranean world. This paper examines a unique witness to its Arabic reception: the account of Troy's fall preserved in Luṭf al-tadbīr fī siyāsat al-mulūk (The Subtle Governance in the Policies of Rulers) by al-Ḫaṭīb al-Iskāfī (d. 421/1030), an Isfahan-born philologist active in Rayy in the circle of the Būyid vizier al-Ṣāḥib ibn ʿAbbād. This mirror for princes—a collection of aḫbār arranged in thirty-three chapters on statecraft and warfare—includes in the section "On subtle management in conquering lands" a detailed retelling of part of the Trojan cycle, from Achilles' quarrel with Agamemnon to the stratagem of the wooden horse.

The account is striking both for its overall fidelity to key episodes of the Greek tradition and for its notable deviations (e.g., Achilles rather than Odysseus conceives the ruse of the horse). The text raises two central questions that guide this study: first, from which tradition did al-Iskāfī's (lost) source ultimately derive? And second, what meaning does this narrative acquire within the Luṭf al-tadbīr?
The first question points to the reactive transmission through which elements of the Trojan Cycle reached Arabic prose. The story seems neither a direct translation of Syriac historiography nor a paraphrase of known Arabic sources, but perhaps a borrowing from didactic material—whether oral anecdotes, Byzantine tactical manuals, or school exercises—that simplified and reframed motifs of the Epic Cycle. The second question situates the tale within al-Iskāfī's rhetorical use of the legendary past for argumentative purposes. Here, the siege of Troy acquires a specific exemplary value that resonates with the other narratives of the anthology, aimed at showing how conflicts can be won not through outmatching opponents in raw power but rather through deception, manipulation, and "subtle governance."

Reception Histories Compared II: 'Life of Ferdowsi' and 'Life of Homer' Narratives
by Gregory Nagy / Harvard University / gn@ilexfoundation.org
The function of traditional narratives about the life and times of a given poet may be considered as "myth" in the sense that details about such a poet's "life" could be based on the historical reception of the actual poetry attributed to the given poet—Ferdowsi in one instance and Homer in the other. Such an argument, however, is prone to misinterpretation if one assumes that "myth" is the opposite of "history." To counter such a misunderstanding, in this joint presentation the speakers argue that narratives about the lives of poets in traditional societies—as in the case of medieval Iran or ancient Greece—can be explored as historical evidence in studying the reception of their poetry. The frequently anachronistic content of such narratives and their ahistorical plotlines—which Aristotle has described as mûthoi or "myths" in the case of ancient Greece—can tell us much about the societies that generated them. Such "myths," then, are "good to think with"—to borrow the words of Claude Lévi-Strauss—in analyzing the Life of Ferdowsi and the Life of Homer narratives as "reception histories." The claims made about Homer in the 'Lives' may be considered as evidence for the various ways in which Homeric poetry was appropriated by different cultural and political centers throughout the ancient Greek-speaking world. Likewise, the historicized narrative of the so-called 'Older Preface' to Shāhnāma, which bears striking parallels to Ferdowsi's own narrative on the genesis of The Book of Kings, blurs the divide between the distant Iranian past and Ferdowsi's present. Juxtaposing the narratives highlights not just common modes of transmission and appropriation but points as well to the nuanced imbrication of myth with fact that underlies so much of the written record of the past.

Reception Histories Compared I: 'Life of Ferdowsi' and 'Life of Homer' Narratives
by Olga Davidson / Boston University / omd@ilexfoundation.org
The function of traditional narratives about the life and times of a given poet may be considered as "myth" in the sense that details about such a poet's "life" could be based on the historical reception of the actual poetry attributed to the given poet—Ferdowsi in one instance and Homer in the other. Such an argument, however, is prone to misinterpretation if one assumes that "myth" is the opposite of "history." To counter such a misunderstanding, in this joint presentation the speakers argue that narratives about the lives of poets in traditional societies—as in the case of medieval Iran or ancient Greece—can be explored as historical evidence in studying the reception of their poetry. The frequently anachronistic content of such narratives and their ahistorical plotlines—which Aristotle has described as mûthoi or "myths" in the case of ancient Greece—can tell us much about the societies that generated them. Such "myths," then, are "good to think with"—to borrow the words of

Claude Lévi-Strauss—in analyzing the Life of Ferdowsi and the Life of Homer narratives as "reception histories." The claims made about Homer in the 'Lives' may be considered as evidence for the various ways in which Homeric poetry was appropriated by different cultural and political centers throughout the ancient Greek-speaking world. Likewise, the historicized narrative of the so-called 'Older Preface' to Shāhnāma, which bears striking parallels to Ferdowsi's own narrative on the genesis of The Book of Kings, blurs the divide between the distant Iranian past and Ferdowsi's present. Juxtaposing the narratives highlights not just common modes of transmission and appropriation but points as well to the nuanced imbrication of myth with fact that underlies so much of the written record of the past.

The Works of Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ and the Book Pahlavi Corpus

by Thomas Benfey / University of Tübingen / tommy.benfey@gmail.com

In this talk I will discuss the works of Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (d. ca. 759) and their relationship to the Book Pahlavi corpus—the group of Middle Persian texts largely authored and transmitted by Zoroastrian priests, which reach the form we have them in during the ninth and tenth centuries, but doubtless draw on a great deal of material that had already emerged during the Sasanian period. Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, meanwhile, is known to have played an important role in transmitting the literature and traditions of the Sasanian empire into early Islamic culture. Scholars including Judith Josephson, Shaul Shaked, and István Kristó-Nagy have noted important parallels between Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ's works and the Book Pahlavi corpus. The question I will explore in this talk is how these parallels should be interpreted: whether they indicate that Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ drew on passages that essentially appeared as they do in Book Pahlavi works such as the Dēnkard, deleting references to Zoroastrianism as he went (as Josephson assumes); or whether we should view both the Zoroastrian priests who authored and transmitted the Book Pahlavi corpus and Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ as having adapted Sasanian traditions to the novel circumstances they faced in the early Islamic period.

Room 2.18

59. Challenges in Studying Religions of Modern Iran

Chair: Marcin Rzepka, Paulina Niechciał

This panel explores the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological complexities involved in studying religious phenomena in modern Iran. It brings together scholars working on diverse aspects of Iranian religious life—both within Iran and in diasporic contexts—to critically engage with the categories and frameworks that shape scholarly discourse. Together, these contributions aim to foster a nuanced discussion on how religion in Iran is conceptualized, studied, and represented, and to contribute to a more critical understanding of it.

The first paper in the panel will offer a general insight into the genesis and contested nature of the concept of "Iranian Religions," tracing its historical development and the tensions surrounding its use in academic and public discourse. Subsequent papers will present focused case studies that highlight the challenges of researching specific religious communities, practices, and scriptures. The second paper explores the conceptual and methodological challenges in researching modern Zoroastrianism. It argues that the existing framework, which prioritizes textual, theological, and philological analysis, would fail to capture the dynamic, contextual, and often hybrid nature of Zoroastrian practices today. The third presentation explores key themes in the Persian Bayan, the primary religious text of Seyyed Ali Mohammad, known as the Báb, who led the Bábi movement from 1844 until his execution in 1850 in Persia. Despite its radical reinterpretation of major religious categories and ideas, there is no critical edition or comprehensive study of the text. In addition, the panel will introduce the forthcoming Oxford Handbook of Iranian Religions (2027), which offers a comprehensive overview of the field and its evolving approaches by bringing together interdisciplinary perspectives and engaging with a variety of contexts.

Reconceptualizing Religion: Introducing the Themes of the Báb's Persian Bayan

by Navid Fozi / Bridgewater State University / nfoziabivard@bridgew.edu

This presentation is based on a close reading of the Persian Bayan, the central yet unpublished work of Seyyed Ali Mohammad, the Báb, founder of the Bábí religion. Despite its role in the emergence of modern Iranian religions, no critical edition or systematic study of the Persian Bayan exists. This presentation introduces some major themes of the text, highlighting its iconoclasm by situating them within the intellectual and social context of nineteenth-century Iran. The study identifies recurring motifs such as the Báb's polemic against clerical authority, the ethic of living 'as if' in perpetual readiness, the dualism of light and fire, the cyclical reenactment of resurrection in history, the world-making power of language, and the telos of preparing for 'He whom God shall make manifest.' It also emphasizes the paradox of universalism bounded by Abrahamic genealogies and the ambiguous modernity of the Báb's reforms, ranging from hygiene and aesthetics to calendrical order. The analysis highlights questions of archetypes, culpability, and the provisional nature of the Báb's revelation. Ultimately, I argue that the Persian Bayan should be read not as a static legal code but as a radical reimagining of revelation: modern in its rationalization, anticipatory in its outlook, and unfinished in its vision. By foregrounding its themes and interpretive tensions, it lays the groundwork for future scholarship.

Challenges in Studying Modern Zoroastrianism

by Paulina Niechciał / Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland / paulina.niechcial@uj.edu.pl

This paper explores the conceptual and methodological challenges in studying modern Zoroastrianism, highlighting the limitations of traditional scholarly approaches that prioritize textual, theological, and philological analysis, often overlooking lived religious experiences and gendered dimensions of practice. Modern Zoroastrianism presents a complex interplay between religious, ethnic, and cultural identities. A key challenge lies in the divergent understandings of Zoroastrianism itself—ranging from ritual orthodoxy rooted in priestly traditions to liberal, individualized interpretations shaped by diaspora life. These differences are not only ethnic (Iranian vs. Parsi) but also generational and ideological, reflecting broader tensions between ritualism and contemporary spiritual agency.

The paper argues that dominant frameworks fail to capture the dynamic, contextual, and often hybrid nature of Zoroastrian practices today. In migration settings, Zoroastrianism is flourishing in new forms. Women play a central role in maintaining and transforming religious traditions, often outside institutional spaces. The emergence of neo-Zoroastrians—individuals who convert to Zoroastrianism—further challenges traditional notions of community boundaries based on ethnicity and heredity, raising questions about legitimacy, inclusion, and identity. The paper confronts the difficulty of accessing and interpreting non-institutional religious practices, often performed in domestic or informal settings, and advocates for a more inclusive and practice-oriented methodology that better captures the fluid, negotiated, and context-sensitive nature of modern Zoroastrianism.

The Oxford Handbook of Modern Iranian Religions – Editorial Reflections on a Work in Progress

by Benedikt Römer / Bundeswehr University Munich, Germany / benedikt.roemer@unibw.de

Since spring 2024, Navid Fozi (Bridgewater State University) and I have been developing the idea of a comprehensive, interdisciplinary handbook that brings together research on the history and present state of religions in modern Iran. This idea has since evolved into an ongoing project, under contract with Oxford University Press as The Oxford Handbook of Modern Iranian Religions, featuring 33 planned contributions that include conceptual chapters alongside concrete case studies.

In my presentation, I would like to share and discuss some of the theoretical and practical questions that have accompanied us during the development of the Handbook, some of which we will address

in our introductory chapter. What should a handbook on religion in modern Iran include, and what can it justifiably omit? Can one write a history of religion in modern Iran without including chapters on the pre-modern era? Are developments in Iranian diaspora communities part of the contemporary Iranian religious landscape, or do they fully belong to the societies in which they take place? Are there topics that ought to be included but must be left out due to a lack of research? And what are the main methodological challenges in the study of modern Iranian religions?
In discussing these and other questions, I would like to present our project to the attending colleagues and exchange ideas on how to approach the history of religions in modern Iran in an adequate and critical manner from a non-theological point of view. While it will no longer be possible to make major adjustments to the table of contents of our Handbook, the feedback received may contribute to the fine-tuning of our introductory chapter and to the guidance we provide our contributors after they have submitted their first drafts.

Room 2.19

60. Popular Shiʿi Observances: Narrative, Ritual, and Identity in Early Modern and Contemporary Iran

Chair: Najm Yousefi

Since the rise of the Safavids to power in the early sixteenth century, Shia Islam has served not only Iran's state religion, but also a major source of collective identity. To this end, popular commemorative narratives and rituals, especially those associated with the tragedy of Karbalāʾ and the veneration of ʻAli and other Shia Imams, have been instrumental in shaping a distinct sense of identity at both local and national levels. The four papers in this panel, presented in chronological order, examine the evolving intersections of Shiʿi devotion, ritual practice, and identity formation in Iran. In so doing, the presentations address the transformation of Shiʿi narratives of martyrdom, religious space, ritual, and collective identity in early modern and contemporary Iran.
The first presentation, "Amīr Pāzvārī: Memory, Identity, and Vernacular Shiʿism in Mazandaran," explores how the poetry attributed to Amīr Pāzvārī (17th–18th c.) articulated Shiʻi themes, particularly the veneration of ʻAli and the Ahl al-Bayt, through Mazandarani dialect, transforming motifs of martyrdom and piety into expressions of vernacular identity in the late-Safavid period. This paper demonstrates how Shiʿi motifs, expressed through a local dialect in Pāzvārī's poetry, informed Mazandarani identity in the late-Safavid period.
"Rowḍeh as Social Commentary and Dissent" argues that the unprecedented popularity of narrative lamentation in mid- to late-Qajar Iran stemmed not only from rowḍeh as redemptive mourning, or from the ample resources provided by the Qajar elite—especially Naser al-Din Shah—but also from rowḍeh's malleability as an apparatus of social critique and dissent.
"From Martyrdom to Mystical Manifestation" traces the evolution of the ʿĀshūrāʾ narrative within three generations of the Niʿmatullāhī Gunābādī Sufi Order from the late nineteenth to the twentieth century. It illustrates the transformation of the narrative of Karbalāʾ from historical commemoration to a mystical expression of love, unity, and spiritual perfection.
Finally, "Contesting Twelver Shiʿi Devotional Practices in Contemporary Iran" addresses the conflict between the practice of qameh-zani and a competing conception of Shiʿi identity represented by post-Islamic-Republic modernism. Given the dominance of the clerical establishment and the state's stance on appropriate ritual practices, this paper highlights the clash between vernacular sectarian expression and the Islamic Republic's religious policies.

Rowḍeh as Social Commentary and Dissent

by Najm Yousefi / Associate Professor of HistoryCalifornia State University, Chico / nyousefi@csuchico.edu

This paper examines the unprecedented rise in the popularity of narrative lamentation of the Karbalāʾ tragedy, broadly known as rowḍeh, in mid- to late-Qajar Iran. While rowḍeh had been a common commemorative practice since the early Safavid period, Qajar Iran witnessed a rapid growth in public Shiʿi observances, which involved melancholic narration of the Karbalāʾ tragedy, oftentimes complemented by singing dirges. Research has previously noted the ample resources provided by the Qajar elite—especially Naser al-Din Shah—for commemorative services, which in turn stimulated their popularity and growth. This paper highlights the key role played by popular preachers (rowḍeh-khānān). Just as the demand for rowḍeh sessions grew in the second half of the nineteenth century, so also popular preachers enjoyed material reward and social status associated with their profession. Remarkably, some preachers used redemptive mourning as an apparatus of social critique and dissent, as well as an opportunity to launch social, cultural, or political criticism. Primary sources such as those by Iʿtimād al-Salṭaneh and ʿEyn al-Salṭaneh recount numerous instances where popular preachers utilized their sermon to criticize the government or even some senior members of the ʿulamāʾ. Police reports from late nineteenth century Tehran offer valuable information on how the police kept rowḍeh sessions under watch and prepared special reports for Naser al-Din Shah. This was because, as the present paper argues, some preachers used rowḍeh gatherings as an opportunity to voice public grievances and offer social commentary on religiously suspect behavior or Western mannerism. The new trend in commemorative services, then, reflect the malleability of rowḍeh. By the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, rowḍeh was widely used for mass mobilization, most notably in political developments such as the Tobacco Protest and the Constitutional Revolution.

Amīr Pāzvārī: Memory, Identity, and Vernacular Shiʿism in Mazandaran
by Nazak Birjandifar / Mount Royal University / nbirjandifar@mtroyal.ca
Amīr Pāzvārī (17th–18th c.), remembered as the “poet of Mazandaran,” occupies a liminal space between history and legend. Described as a semi-legendary figure, his name and attributed corpus of dialect quatrains (amīrī) have become central to Mazandarani cultural memory. This paper explores how Amīr Pāzvārī functions less as a historical author and more as a site of memory, through which vernacular Shiʿism and regional identity were voiced, preserved, and transmitted. References to Karbala, the Imams, and shrine devotion in his attributed verses demonstrate how Shiʿi motifs were localized and woven into the fabric of everyday life. At the same time, the persistence of amīrī poetry in oral traditions and ritual performances underscores its role as a living repository of Mazandarani identity. This identity was articulated in a local dialect but inflected through Shiʿi devotion under Safavid hegemony. By focusing on the interplay of dialect, memory, and religious symbolism, this study argues that Amīr Pāzvārī’s enduring significance lies in how communities remember him as both a vernacular voice of Shiʿism and an emblem of regional belonging in northern Iran.

women

From Martyrdom to Mystical Manifestation
by Reza Tabandeh / Specialized Honour Bachelor of Art (Religious Studies), York University, Department of Humanities.Master of Arts (Study of Religion), University of Toronto, The Department for the Study of ReligionPh.D., University of Exeter / rezatabandeh@yahoo.com
The tradition of narrating and mourning the martyrdom of ImāmḤusayn and his companions occupies a profound place in the spiritual and literary history of Sufism. Among the many Sufi traditions, the Gunābādī Sufi Order—one of the principal branches of the Niʿmatullāhī Order—has consistently emphasized its Shiʿite roots. As a result, the Shiʿite rituals of remembrance, lamentation, and the narration of the tragedy of Karbalāʾ have become integral elements of the Order’s devotional

practice, mystical literature, and spiritual identity.
Mullā ʿAlī Gunābādī, known by his spiritual title Nūr ʿAlī ShāhGunābādī (d. 1337/1919), the successor to Sulṭān ʿAlī ShāhGunābādī (d. 1327/1909), composed a vast narrative-historical encyclopedia about the Ahl al-Bayt entitled Qulzum ("The Ocean"). Within this monumental work, a section entitled Salṭanat al-Ḥusayn ("The [Spiritual] Sovereignty of Ḥusayn") presents a large collection of traditions concerning ImāmḤusayn and the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ. These accounts, often recorded without strict concern for authenticity, reflect a broader devotional approach also evident in earlier Shiʿite scholarship, such as the works of Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī (d. 1110/1699).
Two generations later, Sulṭān Ḥusayn Ṭabandeh, known as RiḍāʿAlī Shāh (d. 1413/1992), the sole master of the Gunābādī order, authored Tajallī-yi Ḥaqīqat ("The Manifestation of Truth"), a detailed mystical treatise on ʿĀshūrāʾ that unites its historical narrative with profound spiritual and metaphysical interpretation. His successor, ʿAlī Ṭabandeh Maḥbūb ʿAlī Shāh, further expanded this mystical vision through sermons and short epistles portraying the martyrdom of Imām Ḥusayn as the ultimate act of divine love—the lover's total sacrifice for the Beloved.
This paper investigates the evolution of this narrative across three generations of the Niʿmatullāhī Gunābādī Sufi Order, highlighting how the remembrance of Karbalāʾ transformed from a historical commemoration into a mystical expression of love, unity, and spiritual perfection.

18:15 – 19:15

Leeuwenbergh

Servaasbolwerk 1a, Utrecht

Keynote Christine van Ruymbeke

"Changes, challenges and opportunities. Persian literary studies in this second quarter of the 21st century."

8:30-10:30 Janskerkhof 2/3

Room 0.13

61. Enduring Signs: Text, Image, and the Afterlives of the Ancient Iranian World

Chair: Touraj Daryaee

This panel explores how the ancient Iranian world and its long afterlives were constituted, visualized, and reimagined through the interplay of text and image across different media, geographies, and temporalities. By tracing how modes of representation—epigraphic, visual, and material—produced, transmitted, and transformed political, religious, and cultural meanings, the panel reconsiders ancient Iran not merely as a historical civilization but as a generative visual and textual archive that endured well beyond antiquity. The panel opens with "The 'Eyes of the King' in Late Antique Iran," which integrates Middle Persian, Persian, and Arabic textual sources with material evidence such as administrative seals to argue that the ancient Iranian secret service was a durable bureaucratic institution, not merely a literary trope. This study shows how the metaphor of royal vision was institutionalized, shaping models of authority that persisted into the Islamic period. Next, "From Ornament to Sign: The Sasanian Diadem and the Semiotics of Kingship" traces the diadem's evolution from a Hellenistic prototype into a codified emblem of Iranian royal legitimacy on coinage and rock reliefs, revealing how this potent symbol operated as a semiotic vehicle for political ideology across transregional networks. The panel then shifts to ritual with "The Magical Function of Nishapur Ceramics," which connects ninth- to tenth-century Nishapur bowls to earlier Zoroastrian and Jewish Aramaic incantation bowls. Through formal and epigraphic analysis, this paper reveals how a shared visual and textual vocabulary of healing was transmitted across temporal and religious boundaries. Finally, "Recasting Antiquity: Visual Mediation and the National Imagination in Iran, 1900–1925" examines the modern reception of the ancient Iranian past through picture postcards, revealing how mechanical reproduction and popular imagery reanimated ancient motifs to construct a modern Iranian identity rooted in pre-Islamic grandeur. Together, the papers illuminate how royal ideology, ritual practice, and collective memory were mediated through forms that blurred the boundaries between writing and seeing, authority and imagination, antiquity and modernity.

The "Eyes of the King" in Late Antique Iran

by Touraj Daryaee / University of California, Irvine / tdaryaee@uci.edu

The existence of an institutionalized secret service in the ancient Iranian world—known in classical sources as the "Eyes and Ears of the King"—has long been a subject of debate. While Greek and Old Persian accounts have been extensively studied, far less attention has been given to the later Middle Persian, Persian, and Arabic sources that reference this office, as well as to the material evidence that might substantiate its presence and function. This paper reexamines the evidence for the so-called Eyes (čašmagān in Middle Persian) during the late antique period (ca. 200–800 CE), arguing that both textual and archaeological data point to the continued operation of this secretive bureaucratic apparatus. Rather than treating the "Eyes of the King" as a symbolic or purely literary construct, this study situates the office within the broader administrative and surveillance mechanisms of late antique Iran, drawing attention to artifacts, inscriptions, and administrative seals that reveal patterns of intelligence gathering and political oversight. The paper further traces the conceptual and institutional afterlives of this office into the early Islamic Caliphate, where similar administrative practices were adapted and rearticulated in new ideological frameworks. By bringing together philological, historiographical, and material evidence, this study demonstrates that the

“Eyes of the King” was not merely a Hellenic trope projected onto Persian governance, but a durable institution that persisted, in various forms, across successive Iranian and Islamic regimes. Ultimately, the paper highlights how the enduring metaphor of royal vision—embodied in the “Eyes” who watched and reported—shaped models of authority, loyalty, and secrecy in Iranian political culture from antiquity to the modern era.

Recasting Antiquity: Visual Mediation and the National Imagination in Iran, 1900–1925
by Amirali Ardekanian / University of California, Irvine / aardekan@uci.edu
Before state-sponsored histories, the picture postcard was the most widespread visual encounter many Iranians had with their ancient Iranian past. This paper investigates this largely unstudied material, detailing its function in heritage formation and identity building during the late Qajar period (1900–1925). As the era’s most influential form of visual mass communication, the postcard was the primary medium through which images of ancient Iranian heritage were mediated and disseminated, transforming remote archaeological sites and ancient monuments into tangible elements of a shared national imagination. The analysis contrasts postcards from European firms such as Enschede & Zonen, which often catered to colonial interests, with the increasingly nationalist productions of Iranian publishers like Seyed Abdulrahim Kashani. These domestic firms responded to a growing market by reprinting nineteenth-century photographs from European travelers or court photographers such as Agha Reza Akkasbashi, democratizing the images and creating new narratives for a local audience. Their subjects and captions reveal a deliberate effort to reclaim the visual narrative from European portrayals of a “crumbled” antiquity and instead project national grandeur. By analyzing the interplay of text and image, this paper illuminates the postcards’ function in the process of historical sense-making around ancient Iran. It concludes that these postcards were not passive records but active agents in forging a collective visual memory. Their power lay in fusing reproducible images of the ancient Iranian past with framings and labelings that blended national pride, archaeological discovery, and popular narratives drawn from the Shahnameh. This synthesis demonstrates how a new, ancient-rooted Iranian identity was visualized and circulated among the masses on an unprecedented scale.

The Magical Function of Nishapur Ceramics in Relation to Zoroastrian and Jewish Healing Bowls
by Simin Amini / University of California, Irvine / simina@uci.edu
This paper investigates the potential magical and ritual functions of a group of Nishapur ceramics dated roughly to the ninth to tenth centuries CE. While these vessels are conventionally interpreted as domestic or decorative wares, their morphology and epigraphic features suggest they may have participated in a broader network of ritual and magical practices in the Iranian world. I propose that some of these bowls, particularly those inscribed in lunette Kufic script, echo the form and visual elements of earlier Aramaic incantation bowls and Zoroastrian healing or fever cups. Their visual and textual characteristics reveal continuities that extend beyond doctrinal and cultural boundaries, reflecting a shared vocabulary of healing, protection, and magical practices.
Nishapur is recognized as a hub of ceramics production and as a center of ritual adaptation and cross-cultural exchange, where Christianity, Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Islamic traditions intersected and transformed each other through material and visual expressions of healing and protection. This study argues that the Nishapur ceramics may bridge a crucial chronological and conceptual gap by placing them within the history of magical and healing practices that connected the Mesopotamian, Iranian, and Islamic worlds. These ceramics may represent an intermediary stage between the Aramaic incantation bowls of late antiquity and the later Islamic magic–medical metal bowls of the thirteenth century to the later periods. This paper explores how such objects transmitted and

transformed ritual knowledge across religious and linguistic boundaries through formal, epigraphic, and contextual analysis.

From Ornament to Sign: The Sasanian Diadem and the Semiotics of Kingship
by Layah ZiaiiBigdeli / Encyclopædia Iranica / lziaiibi@uci.edu
This paper examines the transformation of the diadem—a potent symbol of kingship and divine authority—across Sasanian visual culture and its broader transregional adaptations. Through a semiotic lens, it traces how the Sasanian diadem evolved from Hellenistic and Parthian prototypes into a highly codified emblem of royal power, visible in coinage, rock reliefs, seals, and architectural ornamentation. The study analyzes the diadem's shifting formal and symbolic language, particularly the elaboration of its fluttering filets, which gradually became independent signifiers detached from the human or divine figure. By situating these developments within long-distance artistic exchanges spanning Byzantium, Central Asia, and South Asia, the paper reveals how the Sasanian diadem transcended its original iconographic function to operate as a semiotic vehicle of political ideology, sanctity, and cosmological legitimacy. The discussion ultimately demonstrates how this symbol's transformation illuminates the permeability of visual languages and the dialogic nature of cultural power in late antiquity.

Room 0.17

62. Negotiating Modernity through Space: Reform, Gender, Perception, and Representation in Nineteenth-Century Qajar Iran

Chair: Robert Steele

This panel investigates a pivotal yet understudied dimension of modernity in nineteenth-century Iran: the built and mapped environment. Moving beyond textual and political narratives, we argue that architecture, spatial organization, and cartography were not passive reflections of history but active, material agents in processes of modernization, social negotiation, and imperial vision. By examining the strategic use of space—from state-led reform to religious and urban spheres—this panel highlights how built and visual environments mediated new ideas, negotiating between reform and tradition, gender and space, Iran and the West.

The first paper explores Sepahsalar's architectural vision, showing how buildings designed as parliamentary and ministerial spaces materialized constitutionalist political ideals. The second paper, "Women and the Quiet Reformation of Qajar Madrasas," examines how women's growing presence in mosque–madrasa complexes drove architectural adaptations that enabled new forms of public participation and laid the groundwork for women's formal education. The third paper analyzes the intellectual encounter with the West, tracing how transformed spatial perceptions were embodied in architectural design. Expanding the scope to urban representation, the fourth paper examines nineteenth-century maps of Tehran as instruments of power, revealing how cartographic practices shaped imperial imaginaries and hybrid epistemologies of space.

Together, these papers offer a multifaceted understanding of modernity, connecting political vision, gendered agency, intellectual paradigms, and visual-spatial representation. The panel ultimately reconsiders Qajar architecture and cartography as active participants in Iran's gradual, layered negotiation with modernity.

Women and the Quiet Reformation of Qajar Madrasas
by Maryam Heydarkhani / University of Oxford / heydarkhani.maryam@gmail.com
Historical scholarship on Qajar madrasas has predominantly centred on men as students, scholars, and patrons, rendering women's contributions to these institutions largely invisible. This paper challenges this narrative by arguing that women were significant agents in the social and spatial transformation of madrasas during the 19th century, prior to the modern educational system.

Moving beyond a historiography that limits women's roles to property endowment, this study reveals a dynamic process of female engagement that critically reformed these religious-educational complexes from within.
Through an analysis of primary sources, this paper demonstrates how women's patronage constituted a form of spatial agency. The expansion of Shiite mourning ceremonies within madrasas—which attracted a large female audience—and the development of integrated mosque-madrasa complexes created new demands for female access. In response, women's influence led to deliberate adaptations in the physical structure of these institutions, including the creation of separate entrances and designated areas. These modifications were not passive accommodations but active reconfigurations of space that carved out a legitimate and growing presence for women within a key public institution.
Furthermore, women's financial and social support for religious scholars through the madrasa granted them indirect but significant influence within the socio-religious sphere. This paper contends that these cumulative actions—architectural adaptation, sustained patronage, and social backing—constituted a quiet reformation of the traditional educational system. By examining the Qajar madrasa as a site of gendered negotiation, this research repositions women's roles from the periphery to the forefront of a critical transformation in modern Iranian history: laying the indispensable groundwork for the eventual establishment of formal schools for women in the Constitutional era.

Mapping Modernity: Cartography, Power, and the Representation of Urban Space in Qajar Tehran
by Boshra Moossavi / McGill University / boshra.moosavi@gmail.com
This paper examines nineteenth-century maps of Tehran as instruments of spatial knowledge and political negotiation. Produced between 1826 and 1891 by Russian, Austrian, and Iranian mapmakers, these maps document not only the city's urban growth but also the shifting relationship between European cartographic science and Qajar imperial ambition.
While European colonial maps sought to territorialize external lands, Qajar rulers employed the same techniques to consolidate authority within their own empire, using maps to revive the symbolic unity of the Safavid state. Drawing on the works of Naskov, Berezin, Kerziz, and ʿAbd al-Ghaffār, this study traces how mapmaking evolved from military surveillance to an indigenous bureaucratic practice embedded in institutions like the Dār al-Funūn School. The increasingly scientific precision of these maps—through triangulation, geodesic measurement, and astronomical data—did not signify a wholesale adoption of Western rationality but rather its re-inscription into local frameworks of governance and knowledge.
I argue that these maps represent a hybrid epistemology of space: a modern form used to visualize a pre-modern imperial dream. In doing so, they expose how Qajar Iran negotiated between European modernity and its own traditions of territorial imagination, producing a new visual language of power that was both global and deeply Iranian.

Architecture and the Desire for Political Reform: Sepahsalar's Architectural Ideas
by Mahnam Najafi / Nowruzgan Laboratory for the Study of Persianate World / mahnam.najafi@gmail.com
Can the construction of buildings and the configuration of spaces pave the way for the realization of social and political reforms? Can new architectural forms facilitate social and political transformations and the realization of reformist ideas? Mirza Hossein-e Qazvini (titled Moshir al-Dawleh and later Sepahsalar), a well-known reformist courtier in Qajar Iran, may have held this view. There is explicit and implicit evidence that he believed in the capabilities of architectural form and space to enable his reformist vision.

Seemed to anticipate the Constitutional Movement decades before its success, Sepahsalar strategically built his Baharestan Edifice, attached to a prestigious mosque and in the royal Negarestan Square, intending it to become a parliament, even modeling it after the Ottoman parliament. This vision became reality when the house served as the first parliament building. Further demonstrating his reformist ideals, Sepahsalar, during his brief term as Prime Minister, envisioned transforming Citadel Square into a hub for independent ministries. He commissioned Mirza Mehdi Khan Shaqaqi, later the architect of Sepahsalar's house and mosque in Negarestan Square, to design this project. However, Shaqaqi's design, approved by European engineers, was ultimately abandoned due to Sepahsalar's dismissal.
Sepahsalar, along with Abbas Mirza and Amir Kabir, stands as a key reformer in the Qajar court. His innovative political reforms, advocacy for public rights, and emphasis on the public interest helped pave the way for the constitutional movement. Determined to pursue his ideas, he explored various solutions, including the formation of new institutions, the enactment of laws, the appointment of capable individuals, and the introduction of Western developments to the Shah. This research examines a previously unexplored dimension of Sepahsalar's reforms: their spatial and architectural aspects. By analyzing historical texts, surviving buildings, and visual records, it aims to illuminate Sepahsalar's architectural ideas and achievements in realizing his reformist ideals.

The Relationship with the West, the Transformation of Spatial Perception, and Its Manifestation in Architecture

by Sahra Aberi Zahed / Institute of Human Geography, Goethe University Frankfurt / sahra.zahed@gmail.com

During 19th-century Iran's relationship with the West increased steadily. Although individual contact with the West was still limited, it was not confined to a single group; rather, it encompassed a broader spectrum of society, from the King and courtiers to exiled political opponents, businessmen to students from different social classes.
This growing interaction influenced individuals in various ways. While its effects were not the same for everyone, it undoubtedly broadened their understanding of the world. Physical presence in new environments, movement within them, and the sensory and bodily experience of those spaces affected the perceptual world of these individuals, changed their spatial perception, and created new meanings for architectural concepts. For instance, for someone who had experienced the view of the vast courtyard in front of a house through tall windows, the window could no longer be a mere opening, nor the courtyard simply a central one.
Beyond these visible manifestations, the meaning, definition, and use of spaces also began to shift in people's minds and new conceptualizations of space emerged. These transformations can be traced both in the physical changes occurred in certain architectural and urban spaces, and in the written critiques and desperations reflecting the existed situation or envisioned better and more ideal ones. This research seeks to understand the process of these perceptual changes and their architectural manifestations in 19th-century Iran. By analyzing primary texts and people's descriptions of what existed, what they criticized, and what they considered ideal or aspired to create, we aim to gain insight into their spatial perception and its influence on architecture during that period.

Room 0.19

63. Short Story as Material for Teaching Persian as a Foreign Language

Chair: Mahdi Touraj, Pouneh Shabani-Jadidi

This panel aims to discover various ways in which Persian short story can be used in teaching Persian language at various proficiency levels. Historically, stories have been adopted in teaching Persian language through classical Persian prose like stories of Sa'di's Golestan. The reason why such narratives were used in teaching Persian was not only the literary or linguistic value of the stories but

also their ability to captivate the readers and raise their interest, resulting in an intrinsic motivation to continue studying.
In addition, due to their varying lengths and complexity levels, short stories can be geared appropriately to different proficiency levels. Short stories can also serve differentiated language learning in that students can be assigned different short stories based on their proficiency levels. Based on the teaching experience of the panelists, they will offer the blueprint to teach such a course and the best practices they have learned over the years teaching the course. This is particularly important because in most of the Persian language programs, the focus is mainly on the language and reading classical Persian literature, while modern Persian literature is mostly taught in English by the core faculty. Teaching Persian through short stories will bridge the core and the language courses in that students taking modern Persian literature will be able to read and discuss the works they have been exposed to in English.
This panel aims to seek answers to questions like: How to select the short stories to be used in class? How to alter the texts to be used in different levels? What to focus on when teaching short stories? What tasks to assign to students to guide them to be ultimately independent learners? What formative and what summative assessments to use in a short story class?
The four presentations focus on adopting fantasy, surrealism, and the paranormal to enhance interest and encourage automatic subconscious learning; creating Data-Driven Learning activities (DDL) for second language learning and short story classes; enhancing strategies for Maximized Student Engagement and Proficiency Development; and presenting Afghan and Iranian short stories to students to familiarize them with the cultural complexities of Iranian and Afghan communities in various times and geographies.

The Persian Short Story and Translation: Journey to course development
by Pouneh Shabani-Jadidi / University of Chicago / pshabanijadidi@uchicago.edu
Although teaching material for introductory and intermediate level Persian abound, there are very few coursebooks that are aimed for the advanced level students. Some of these coursebooks are developed for Persian for Specific Purposes, such as What the Persian Media Says (Shabanai-Jadidi 2015), Persian Academic Reading (Aghdassi 2019), and Persian in International Relations and Foreign Policy (Esmaili-Sardari and Mizza 2022).
Since Persian language and Persian literature are intertwined, a natural next step after general Persian language textbooks is modern Persian prose. Short stories due to their conciseness are a perfect candidate for material for advanced level students. However, care must be taken in choosing the right kind of texts so that the linguistic and literary level of the selected short stories are not far beyond the proficiency level of the students, otherwise, they will get discouraged. Also, the genre of short stories selected must be chosen such that they will attract the students' attention, especially in today's world where the attention span of the youth is getting shorter.
In the present talk, I will walk you through a course I have created for advanced level students of Persian language, which focuses on short stories encompassing elements of fantasy, surrealism, and the paranormal, such as Hedayat's The Doll Behind the Curtain, Daneshvar's The Snake and the Man, Golestan's The Fish and its Pair, Esma'ili's Animal Diseases, and others. I will review class activities and students' tasks. I will also discuss how allocating part of the class to a translation workshop enhances students' comprehension of the text. Finally, I will discuss the assignments as well as the formative and summative assessments I use in this course. I hope to be able to present a blueprint for the process of course and material development for the younger generation of Persian language instructors.

Improving Language Skills and Enriching Literature Learning through Short Stories: A Data-Driven Strategy for Persian Second Language and Contemporary Literature Classes

by Azita H. Taleghani / University of Toronto / azita.taleghani@utoronto.ca

Over the past two decades, the use of literary texts to teach four language skills and language components, such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, has gained popularity. Among different literary genres, short stories can be seen as a substantial genre for teaching language classes. In short stories, characters play genuinely and symbolically, as individuals do in their daily lives. Indeed, short stories reflect and illustrate human lives (Sage, 1987). Short stories serve as a bridge between language and literature, allowing students to immerse themselves in the richness of the language while exploring cultural themes and complex characters. This presentation focuses on using short story materials in Persian second language learning and contemporary short story classes at the University of Toronto. The discussion of this presentation highlights the similarities and differences in teaching materials, teaching, and assessment methods in each classroom. By examining the learning objectives and outcomes of each class and applying the Data-Driven Learning Approach, I will discuss how, by using carefully selected narratives and creating Data-Driven Learning activities (DDL) for second language learning and short story classes, educators can create engaging, relatable content that resonates with students, making the learning experience more impactful. This presentation also demonstrates that embracing this effective method elevates Persian classes and inspires a lifelong love for Persian literature among our students.

Teaching Persian through Short Stories: When Worlds of Words Collide

by Yass Alizadeh / NYU / ya32@nyu.edu

In this paper, I delve into the layered cultural and linguistic competencies achieved by L2 learners through reading Iranian and Afghan short stories, and the learning outcomes of teaching Persian by reading the short texts created by popular authors such as Hedayat, Ravanipur and Soltanzadeh who focus on oral communities that connect to each other through folklore and folktales. Oral versus written and formal versus conversational Persian will be part of this ongoing research as the premise of the teaching pedagogy of applying short stories to language learning not only ties vocabulary in context to distinguishing and differentiating public versus private language, but also helps the students apply the learned vocabulary in appropriate presentational, interpretive and interpersonal modes. While reading short stories helps students with reading competency and sounding out Persian utterances, delving into the content of tales familiarizes them with the cultural complexities of Iranian and Afghan communities in various times and geographies. In addition, as a social process in a wholistic approach, learning Persian through short stories invites L2 learners to both engage with the collective cultural base of a text, and appreciate the individual behind the story; the author.

Harnessing the Power of Short Stories in the Persian Language Classroom: Strategies for Maximized Student Engagement and Proficiency Development

by Nahal Akbari / University of Maryland, College Park / nakbaris@umd.edu

Eliciting free-constructed responses from learners in the language classroom is one of the core principles of instructed SLA (Ellis, 2008). With this principle in mind, one of the best ways to create highly engaging, culturally rich, and meaningful contexts in the classroom is the incorporation of short stories as instructional materials. Along with their cultural, literary and aesthetic value, as well as the possibilities that level-appropriate short stories provide for the acquisition of certain grammatical structures and lexical items, one key affordance is the potential of short stories for dialogic reading and purposeful communication, or “talk around the text” (Ivanič and Weldon, 2000). This presentation will focus on techniques that provide opportunities for learners to use their developing language skills -with appropriate scaffolding- to express their own personal meanings,

and participate in individual, pair, or group activities that position them as “discoverers” and “creators of meaning” through short stories. Sample activities will be shared from an advanced Persian class where The Story of the Rabbit and the Tomato by Zoya Pirzad is the central short story to illustrate how learners can engage in information gap, reasoning-gap, and opinion-gap activities and bring their own backgrounds, personal responses and interpretations to the “voices and choices” (Daniels, 2023) of the central character. In addition, multimodal sources such as recorded interviews with the author, podcasts and digital story telling platforms, and drawing on comparisons to other authors that students are familiar with, all provide a rich, motivating context for interactive input beyond the text of the short story.

Room 0.21

64. Iran in the Second World War

Chair: Rudi Matthee, Elena Andreeva

The panel brings to light some little-known aspects of Iranian history during the Second World War and aspires to balance its multi-national character and the role of the local players. Having developed a close relationship with Germany by the outbreak of the war, Iran was occupied by the Allies for whom supplying the Soviet Union through the “Persian corridor” became essential by 1942. As a result of those imperial games played out on its territory, Iran endured political chaos and severe economic hardship.

The first paper addresses the strategic plans of the British Army and the Wehrmacht in 1939-1943. Based on British and German archives, it demonstrates how both sides initially designed detailed campaigns based on the assumption that Iran would play a pivotal role in the struggle to control the Middle East and how such map exercises resulted in turning Iran into an enormous Allied army camp.

The second paper examines foreign occupation and widespread famine in Iran during both World Wars. It relies on subaltern sources, including testimonies from Iranian citizens, Polish refugees, and war veterans, and builds upon the extant literature by incorporating the perspective of path dependency.

The third paper explores the cultural and musical lives of Polish exile-refugees in Iran during the war and their legacy. It uses a collection of photographs, programme notes, concert invitations and letters that belonged to the singer Irena Valdi-Gołębiowska (1891-1979) as a lens in the context of individual versus collective narratives of migratory experiences.

The last paper explores archival photographs taken by American and British forces in Iran during its occupation: supplying the Soviets through the “Persian corridor” is the dominant theme of those photographs. The paper examines the evidence they offer, both material (types of technology) and non-material (the spirit of cooperation, possible agendas of the photographers).

The “Persian corridor” in photographs made by Western Allies

by Elena Andreeva / St. Andrews / andreevae@vmi.edu

The paper is dedicated to the photographs taken by members of the American and British military in Iran during the Second World War. Although the protection of oil resources and subversive German activities were given as principal reasons for the Anglo-Soviet invasion, the need to supply the Soviet Union, through the “Persian corridor,” became essential by 1942 – according to Winston Churchill, it was to open “the fullest communication with Russia.” Iran became the only place where tens of thousands of Soviet forces and tens of thousands of British and American forces cooperated in close proximity – which created an uneasy alliance united by a common goal but also divided by multiple rivalries.

The paper presents several groups of archival photographs, for example those taken by Sergeant Frederick Winterburn, who served in Iran with No. 159 Railway Construction Company of the Royal Engineers, and Nick Parrino of the US Office of War Information. Supplying the Soviets through Iran is

the main theme of the photographs, with the Trans-Iranian Railroad playing the lead role. The railroad construction had been delayed by the rivalry between the British and the Russians; when the railroad was finally built in 1927-1938 with Western technological assistance, it became a symbol of modernization and national strength – and it also prompted the Allied occupation during the Second World War.
On the one hand, the photographs document material and technological aspects of the Allied interaction and present images of locomotives, tunnels, runaway accidents and train stations, as well as tanks, trucks and airplanes supplied to the Soviets. On the other hand, there are multiple images of the interaction between British, American and Soviet engineers and military personnel of various ranks. There is an unmistakable spirit of cooperation reflected in the photographs – something that might make us feel nostalgic today.

A Path Dependent Perspective on Occupation and Famine in Wartime Iran: The Roots of Delayed Development, Aspirational Independence, and Anti-Imperialist Ideology

by Eric Lob / Florida International University / elob@fiu.edu

This paper examines the causes and consequences of foreign occupation and widespread famine in Iran during both World Wars. It contributes to the scholarship on this understudied subject by exploring it within a bottom-up and developmental framework. Methodologically, while previous studies rely on government documents, the paper analyzes secondary and subaltern sources, including testimonies from Iranian citizens, Polish refugees, and war veterans. Conceptually, it builds upon the extant literature on wartime occupation and famine in Iran by incorporating the perspective of path dependency. In the process, the paper investigates how they impacted Iran's economic and political development during and after the wars.
The 1953 coup tends to be framed as Iran's main grievance toward the West. Less scholarly attention has been given to the Western and Soviet occupations of Iran during both World Wars that precipitated the famines of 1917-19 and 1942-43. Within the scholarship on Iranian history and politics, the occupations and famines remain understudied, and debates persist on their causes and consequences, including recent political controversy between the Islamic Republic and United Kingdom over who was to blame. The occupations and famines imposed a significant human cost on Iran and severely set it back developmentally. They possessed historical parallels and comprised critical junctures in Iran's political and economic evolution. More specifically, they put Iran on the path to delayed development, aspirational independence, and anti-imperialist and non-aligned ideology. Such concepts and consequences were subsequently embodied in Mosaddegh's oil industry nationalization during the 1950s, the Shah's development drive during the White Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s, and Khomeini's Reconstruction Jihad after the Iranian Revolution between 1979 and the early 1980s.

Peering Through the Cracks. Polish Musicians in Tehran 1942 to 1945: The Case of Irena Valdi-Gołębiowska

by Laudan Nooshin / BA Music (Leeds)MMus Ethnomusicology (London)PhD Ethnomusicology (London) / l.nooshin@city.ac.uk

This paper reports on a project exploring the cultural and musical lives of Polish exile-refugees in Iran during World War 2, and the longer-term legacy of the Polish presence in Iran. In the spring and summer of 1942, an estimated 200,000 to 300,000 Poles arrived in Iran, having travelled thousands of miles from recently opened-up Soviet labour camps in Siberia and elsewhere in Central Asia. Thousands died of starvation, cold and disease on the way. Of those who survived, many of the able-bodied joined the 'Anders Army' which operated under British command. Others were taken to Tehran and other cities in Iran, or to refugee camps in India and Africa.

Notwithstanding people's sense of transience, a Polish cultural presence was established in Tehran within a relatively short period, with schools, cultural institutions, radio stations, newspapers and cafés. And there were also musicians. This paper focuses on the singer Irena Valdi-Gołębiowska (1891-1979) who, with her sister Maria, arrived in Tehran in 1942 where she lived until 1945 before moving to Beirut and eventually to the UK. Despite the fragmentary historical record, Irena's collection of photographs, programme notes, concert invitations and letters becomes a lens through which to explore the activities of Polish musicians in Tehran during WW2 and to understand something of the geography of the Polish presence in the city. More broadly, the paper examines how legacies of migrant stories are formed and narrated, and how we recover individual stories against narratives of collective migratory experiences.

The battle that never was: Iran in the British and German grand strategy, 1939-1943

by Roman Siebertz / Ph.D 2005, research fellow and deputy professor at Bonn University (2006-2019) and Hamburg University (2011), senior lecturer at Frankfurt University, Bonn University and Göttingen University (since 2024) / roman.siebertz@gmx.net

While research on Iran's role in World War II has been focused on the country's significance as a transit corridor and on the consequences of the Allied occupation for the nation's political and social life, the strategic role of Iran in the warring parties' planning has, so far, received little attention. Based on British and German military records and memoranda, this presentation will examine Iran's position in the war planning of the Axis powers and the Allies, and discuss how these plans changed during the course of the war. In this context, Iran's status shifted from that of a hinterland of British and Soviet military efforts to that of the setting of an anticipated decisive battle for the control of the entire Middle East. In the course of these planning processes, Iran increasingly transformed into a deployment area of massed military units, whose deployment and supply had repercussions on other war fronts. Only German defeats in Stalingrad and North Africa finally eliminated this military threat and simultaneously paved the way for Iran's formal inclusion into the ranks of the Allied nations. In addition to the military and political background of the military planning and the discussion of the various operational options, the presentation also takes into account the question of what social and humanitarian consequences the implementation of the respective strategic plans would have had for Iran's economy and population in the short and long term.

Room 0.22

65. Navigating the Persianate Cosmopolis: Pre-modern and Modern Ottoman Intellectuals in the Face of Persian Cultural and Scientific Heritage

Chair: Ahmet Baris Ekiz

This panel looks into the reception of Persianate literary, cultural and scientific traditions in the Ottoman scholarly and intellectual milieus in the pre-modern and modern periods. Bringing together four individual cases that lay out a long history of Ottoman engagement with Persian culture, this panel aims to reveal the ways in which Ottoman intellectuals admired, contested, and undermined the Persian cosmopolitan cultural legacy in the domains of art, literature, and philosophy from the sixteenth to early twentieth centuries. Our panel will problematize the prevalent conceptualizations of the Ottoman reception of Persian heritage as a one-way exchange consisting of cultural appropriation, imitation and translation, and instead will adopt a historicist approach that shows context-bound processes of engaging with Persia and Persian literary and scientific canon. Therefore we will approach Ottoman engagements with the Persian canons of art and science not as a biographical matter of curiosity, or of lofty, detached intellectual attraction, but as historically conditioned political interventions in the context of the longue-duree rivalry between the Ottomans and Iranian dynasties for universal sovereignty and imperial monopoly. Consequently, the Ottoman intellectuals that will be the focus of our case studies were all high-ranking statesmen that had

leverage on Ottoman policy-making; therefore, their intellectual engagements were all invested in the imperial politics of their own time. As a repository of cultural refinement and truth, Persian canons of art and science stood out as equally salient reference points for a sixteenth century Ottoman chief-jurisconsult as for a twentieth century poet in their philosophical inquiries. Our intellectuals coped with their own historical reality and probed the questions of identity, empire, and the truth of creation through the lens of the Persian arcadia, asserting their intellectual authority by contributing to, and sometimes undermining, the universally shared heritage of the Persian canon. In our papers, therefore, we will address less documented historical episodes in which Ottoman learned elites have redefined their relationship to the Persianate canon through complex modes of engagement as reflected in Ottoman scientific curricula, cultural traditions, and diplomatic exchange to legitimize Ottoman sovereignty and authority in the political and intellectual domains of the Persianate world.

Philosophy and Empire: Ottoman Engagements with Persian Metaphysics in the Age of Rival Sovereignties

by Ahmet Baris Ekiz / Independent Scholar / bekiz@umich.edu

In the second half of the fifteenth century, Persian scholars centered in Shiraz engaged in intense debates over ʻAli Qushji's (d. 1474) commentary on Nasir al-Din Tusi's (d. 1274) textbook in philosophical theology, Tajrid al-Iʻtiqād. The central figures in this controversy were Jalal al-Din al-Dawani (d. 1502) and the father-son duo of the Dashtakis. While recent scholarship—most notably by Reza Pourjavady, Khaled El-Rouayheb, and Ahab Bdaiwi—has examined their respective positions, it has largely confined itself to technical analyses of their arguments within the Avicennan philosophical tradition and logic. These debates addressed foundational questions in metaphysics, such as the nature of God as the Necessary Existent, the eternity of the world, necessary causation, emanation, and the intellective soul.

Less explored, however, is the broader historical and philosophical significance of this controversy within the transregional intellectual landscape of the early sixteenth-century Mediterranean. This paper examines the Ottoman reception of the Qushji-Dawani-Dashtaki dispute by focusing on the treatise on the intellective soul by the prominent Ottoman scholar, jurist, and philosopher Kemalpaşazade (d. 1534). In this work, Kemalpaşazade engages critically—and often polemically—with both Qushji's commentary and Dawani's supercommentary on Tajrid al-iʻtiqād.

By situating this treatise within the broader context of Ottoman–Safavid imperial rivalry and their competing claims to universal sovereignty, I argue that Kemalpaşazade's polemical tone against Dawani was more than academic critique. It constituted a strategic intellectual intervention by the leading Ottoman scholarly authority to assert control over the epistemic foundations of philosophical theology, and thereby reinforce the Ottoman Empire's claim to universal legitimacy in the early modern Islamic world.

Late Ottoman Persophilia: The Case of Feylesof Rıza Tevfik (Bölükbaşı)

by Mert Aydemir / University of Chicago / mertaydemir826@gmail.com

This paper explores the phenomenon of "Persophilia" in the late Ottoman Empire through the writings of Rıza Tevfik (Bölükbaşı, 1869–1949), a philosopher, poet, and politician whose intellectual career intersected with the most turbulent years of the late Ottoman period. Borrowing the term from Hamid Dabashi, Persophilia connotes not only a scholarly interest in Persian culture but also a deeper fascination and infatuation with its literary, philosophical, and civilizational legacy. Istanbul emerged as a crucial public sphere where Orientalists, Iranian émigrés, and Ottoman intellectuals engaged in cultural exchanges and contributed to the discourses on Persophilia.

In a similar vein to many Orientalists of the nineteenth century, Rıza Tevfik's Persophilia operates within the textual pantheon of the Persian language and literature, as he never set foot on Iranian soil. Be that as it may, his writings on Persian culture and Iran articulate an image of Iran as a homeland of poetry, mysticism, and civilizational grandeur. The paper aims to contextualize and problematize Rıza Tevfik's Persophilia instead of taking it for granted. Was Rıza Tevfik's infatuation with Persian culture an idiosyncrasy among late Ottoman intellectuals or an example of a broader phenomenon? How different was Rıza Tevfik's approach to Persian culture from pre-modern Ottoman interest in things Persian? This research will also locate Rıza Tevfik's Persophilia within the Ottoman public sphere between 1908 and 1922. It argues that his fascination with Iran was not an isolated eccentricity but part of a wider negotiation of the discourses on empire, nation, cultural identity, and modernity, in general, as reflected in his polemics against Turkish nationalists. His intellectualism stands as an example of entangled histories of Ottoman, Iranian, and European intellectual worlds in the early twentieth century.

Redrawing the Border: Diplomatic and Historiographic Developments in Mehmed Tahir Münif Pasha's Iranian Epistle

by Kyle Capps / University of Michigan - Ann Arbor / kbcapps@umich.edu

During the early nineteenth century, international relations between the Ottoman Empire and Qajar Iran had become strained, but the latter half of the century witnessed efforts at diplomatic rapprochement between the two states. During Mehmed Tahir Münif Pasha's (1828 – 1910 C.E.) first appointment as Ottoman ambassador to Iran in the 1870s, he saw the mural of Fath ʿAli Shah displayed in the Negarestan Palace in Tehran. This mural visually depicted several former Ottoman officials to the shah's court, and Münif Pasha was told the story of these functionaries and their role within a border dispute incited by Ottoman vassals, members of the Kurdish Baban dynasty. Inspired by these depictions and the story surrounding them, Münif Pasha commissioned illuminated manuscripts, which reproduced these paintings and conveyed the perspective of four Ottoman-affiliated actors during this diplomatic episode.

While scholars have explored this text as a reflection of Münif Pasha's career within the broader context of late nineteenth century Ottoman politics, I position his work at the nexus of shifting diplomatic and historiographic trends that culminated in renewed efforts at international cooperation between the Ottoman and Qajar states. I argue that this manuscript, the Iranian Epistle, served as a didactic work, illustrating proper and improper ambassadorial conduct through a salient historical example. Through his choice to invoke dual chronologies within his manuscript, the writer both situated himself within the tradition of Ottoman ambassadors while illustrating his recent success in mending relations between the two empires. Therefore, I contend that, through the synthesis of Iranian artistic production and Ottoman Turkish prose, Münif Pasha created diplomatic gifts emblematic of the potential for cultural and political cooperation that he strove for in his role as Ottoman ambassador to Iran.

War, Diplomacy, and Hostility: Ottoman Perceptions of Iran in Mehmed Refî Efendi's Sefâretnâme

by Gul Banu Kayir Ucsu / MES, University of Chicago / kayirbanu@uchicago.edu

In 1804, with the Russian occupation of Ganja and the siege of Erivan, the Russo-Persian War began. Two years later, after the Ottoman Empire recognized Napoleon's imperial title and, at France's request, dismissed the rulers of Wallachia and Moldavia in violation of its 1805 alliance treaty with Russia, Russian forces entered these principalities. In response, the Ottoman Empire declared war on Russia in December 1806. Confronted with a common enemy, Iran invited the Ottomans to send an envoy to discuss the possibility of a future alliance.

Appointed to this mission, Seyyid Mehmed Ref'i Efendi (1756–1816) departed Istanbul for Tehran on May 23, 1807, and later submitted to the Sublime Porte a sefâretnâme recounting his encounters in Iran. Unlike earlier embassy reports, his account displays open hostility toward Iranian culture. This paper examines the language of hostility in Mehmed Ref'i Efendi's sefâretnâme, particularly depictions of arrogance, immorality, and opportunism, to explore the foundations of Ottoman Persophobia and its possible emergence as part of a broader shift in tone across early nineteenth-century bureaucratic, popular, and intellectual discourses.

Room 1.09

66. The Constitutional Revolution (1906–11) and Beyond – Spatial, Temporal, and Relational Dimensions

Chair: Salomé Michel, Anja Pistor-Hatam

The purpose of this panel is to facilitate a more profound comprehension of the spatial, temporal and relational dimensions of "the pivot of modern Iranian history" (A. Ansari). This will be accomplished through presentations on recent innovative research, focusing on marginalised or peripheral groups and individuals. The Constitutional Movement comprised astonishing alliances between ingroups and outgroups, Iranians at home and abroad, and those from both above and below. Furthermore, the revolution transformed relations between individuals and groups, as well as between the centre and the periphery. Disputes between liberal and leftist intellectuals and freethinkers, on one side, and orthodox clerics, on the other over concepts such as "consultation" or equal rights before the law could only be resolved through compromise. In addition to the establishment of a Guardian Council in the inaugural Iranian constitution, which was also incorporated into the constitution of the Islamic Republic, thought leaders of the 1979 revolution were profoundly influenced by the arguments against parliamentary rule that had been advanced by their predecessors (temporal dimension). However, the Constitutional Revolution was not solely the domain of lay and clerical thinkers. By means of petitions addressed to the National Assembly, particularly those pertaining to more equitable taxation, ordinary citizens contributed to the multifarious chorus of participants (spatial and relational dimensions). Also, Iranian merchants operating within the Ottoman Empire were instrumental in the dissemination of petitions in support of the Constitutional Movement to foreign governments. Through their own newspapers they vociferously advocated for a constitution and a national assembly, while expressing strong opposition to imperialism (spatial dimension). These demands put forward by constitutionalists and revolutionaries were also supported by individuals and groups who were frequently accused of heresy and apostasy. Adhering to the tenets of Shiite Islam, several heterodox intellectuals assumed the roles of reformers, preachers, leaders of the revolution and intermediaries. Through their relations with esteemed Shi'i clerics, the disapproval they frequently encountered would, on occasion, evolve into tolerance, motivated by a profound respect for fellow constitutionalists (relational dimension).

Advocates from afar? Iranians in Egypt and the Constitutional Revolution (1906-1911)

by Sara Zanotta / Università degli Studi di Torino / sara.zanotta@unito.it

The events and ideals of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911 were not confined to the borders of Qajar Iran. Conversely, facilitated by the global technological developments occurred during the 19th century, they reverberated across Asia, North-East Africa, and Europe where Iranian communities of varying sizes attentively observed the revolutionary events and, despite distance, participated in them. They established anjomans, protested the royalist repression and the imperialist encroachment on the country, and raised funds for the revolutionaries in Iran.
This paper explores the activism of the Iranian community in Egypt, in particular in Cairo and Alexandria, during the Constitutional Revolution. During the 19th and the early 20th centuries, Egypt

had represented one of the destinations of Iranians abroad, mostly merchants, attracted by the business opportunities and the relatively more liberal environment of Egyptian cities. While constantly interacting with the Egyptian context, they maintained close ties with Iran, as testified by the contents and circulation of the Persian-language newspapers they published. Drawing upon the issues of one of these newspapers, Chehreh-nemā, and archival sources, including petitions from the Anjoman-e Vefāq-e Irānian of Cairo to foreign governments, this presentation discusses how the experience in a foreign country under British rule impacted their local perceptions of revolutionary events. It asks what discursive tools and political strategies Iranians in Egypt adopted to express constitutionalist and anti-imperialist support despite distance, and whether this community was unified in its stance.

The Legacy of Anti-Constitutionalism in the Twentieth-Century Iranian Discourse on Islamic Council (showra)

by Alisa Shablovskaia / University of Oslo / alisa.shablov@gmail.com

The Constitutional Revolution of 1906 not only transformed Iran's political institutions but also reshaped its intellectual and literary landscape. It gave rise to new genres of political writing – both constitutionalist and anti-constitutionalist treatises – and intensified debates over classical Perso-Islamic concepts, most notably showra (consultation). While this early political literature has received considerable scholarly attention, its long-term influence on Iranian Islamic political thought remains underexplored. This paper examines the treatment of showra in anti-constitutionalist texts by figures such as Mohammad Hasan b. 'Ali Akbar Tabrizi and Shaykh Abu-l-Hasan Najafi Marandi, and compares it with interpretations of showra articulated between the 1950s and 1980s by Mahmud Taleqani, 'Ali Shariati, and Mahdi Bazargan. Contrary to the dominant view that the Islamist discourse on showra emerged primarily as a response to the rise of communism and the council-based (showra) political model, this paper argues that revolutionary thinkers of 1979 significantly drew on and reinterpreted anti-constitutionalist critiques – particularly the framing of the national assembly as a foreign, anti-Islamic (or even anti-Shi'i) imposition that either privileged majority rule over divine authority or imposed a minority rule on Muslims. The paper further suggests that the key shift from anti-constitutionalist to Islamist discourse lies not so much in its engagement with Marxism, but in its selective appropriation of Western positivist and civilizational language, especially concerning ideas of nature and tribe. By tracing these continuities and transformations, the paper offers a new perspective on the evolution of modern Persian political thought through the lens of conceptual inheritance and genre adaptation.

The constitutional movement from below: the case of Khurasan

by Nader Sohrabi / Global History, Free University Berlin / nadersohrabin@gmail.com

Iran's constitutional revolution is re-interpreted through a new evidentiary lens: petitions submitted by the public to the Assembly. These reveal the exorbitant taxes of the late Qajar era as the primary driver of public discontent, channelled through traditional means such as houses of justice. Yet, once the public revolt merged into the constitutional movement from above, they reinforced one another and advanced the constitutional cause. More importantly, that mixture brought previously overlooked local victories that managed to expand rights on the ground. At the same time, the tensions between the two movements remained unresolved. Khurasan serves as a case study of these developments.

Between Tolerance and Intolerance: Heterodox Intellectuals and the Constitutional Movement in Iran

by Anja Pistor-Hatam / Professor for Islamic Studies / pistor-hatam@islam.uni-kiel.de

It is evident that the Qajar epoch was characterised by a pervasive culture of intolerance and violence. This is particularly obvious in the context of the emergence of the New Religious Movements, firstly of the Bābiyya and subsequently of the Bahā'iyya, which led to internal strife, persecution, torture and execution becoming an everyday occurrence for many individuals in Iran. In the aftermath of the Tobacco Revolt, the demands for reform and restriction on foreign economic, diplomatic, and military interventions reached a zenith with the Constitutional Revolution. During the constitutional movement, proponents of liberal ideas were often accused of being 'heretics' or 'apostates'. Constitutionalists such as Malek ol-Motakallemīn, Jamāl od-Dīn Vāʿez or Yahyā Doulatābādī, who were simultaneously well-educated Shiite clerics and freethinkers, were frequently threatened with the 'sword of excommunication' by their clerical opponents. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the act of conversion from Islam to another religion was regarded as transgressing the very limits of Islamic tolerance, those accused in this manner frequently collaborated closely with prominent Shiite clerics. This paper will demonstrate that the unfavourable conditions for tolerance towards alleged 'heretics' notwithstanding, alliances of convenience and temporary alliances were formed. These coalitions enabled the inclusion of different individuals and groups, who could only be included because they were all embedded in the superordinate category of constitutionalists. Clearly, the prevailing conditions which comprised the key factors that generally promote intolerance towards the 'religious other' – a dominant religion, arbitrary rule, and the elites' desire to hold on to power – were unfavourable for tolerance or even mere tactical and temporary toleration. However, like-minded Shiite jurists tamed their disapproval of heterodox intellectuals through the respect they accorded them as reformers, liberals and constitutionalists. As will be demonstrated in this paper, apart from the cognitive and behavioural components of respect, affection and empathy likewise played a role in their relationships. Drawing upon microhistorical sources, such as memoirs and biographies, this study will demonstrate that, in addition to the cognitive and behavioural dimensions of respect, affection and empathy also played a significant role in their interpersonal dynamics.

Room 1.10

67. Broadening histories of Iran in the long nineteenth century through the study of commodities

Chair: Joanna de Groot

Scholarship on nineteenth-century Iran often relies on sources that emphasize elites, high politics, and large-scale trade or production. Such material can obscure the everyday lives and agency of a broader population. This panel highlights new approaches to understanding how commodities shaped social, political, and economic change in and around Iran between the 1770s and 1900.

The first paper examines the silk trade and production in Gilan, showing how local merchants actively participated in reshaping governance during the rise of the Qajar dynasty. The second paper investigates textile manufacture, exploring how gender dynamics influenced production and how overlooked participants shaped regional economies. The final paper focuses on opium cultivation, commerce, and consumption, demonstrating how growers, traders, and users influenced networks of exchange and the circulation of capital.

Together, these presentations reveal how the production, movement, and use of silk, textiles, and opium were not merely economic activities but social forces that transformed governance, labor relations, cross-regional connections, and everyday life. They illustrate how diverse groups engaged with and altered political and economic developments, even when surviving records privilege official or elite perspectives.

By centering commodities as a lens of analysis, the panel shows how new accounts of material life illuminate the agency of individuals and communities often left at the margins of conventional accounts. It underscores the methodological creativity required to work with sources that rarely document these actors directly. Through detailed case studies, the panel demonstrates how the

study of commodities can offer powerful entry points for understanding the complex interplay of local initiative, global exchange, multiple agencies,and state formation in nineteenth-century Iran.

Threading gender with 'history from below': textile histories as pathways to gendered social histories of nineteenth century Iran

by Joanna de Groot / University of York, UK / joanna.degroot@york.ac.uk

As with historical investigations of many societies there are real challenges to the exploration and appreciation of the experiences and activities of those nineteenth century Iranians with limited resources, power, or influence. Source material was largely generated by those with dominant roles in the material, governmental, and cultural spheres and thus shaped by their interests and world views. Creators of large historical narratives of political, economic, or cultural developments in nineteenth century Iran often reproduce the 'top down' perspectives of governing, entrepreneurial, and cultural elites on these processes. Nonetheless both the source material and historiography of Iran in this period potentially allow us to raise and research questions about the lives, roles, and views of other Iranians. The work of Cronin, Martin, and Moqadam on popular life and discontent like that of Amanat, Wallbridge, and Momen on the Babi movement show how sources can be used to make histories of the unprivileged. This presentation will examine the potential for investigating and interpreting the pasts of ordinary producers and users of textile goods, and in particular for addressing the gender bias/blindness of most accounts of those aspects of Iranian life. It will both reread familiar sources and narratives and suggest the use of less familiar material as well as conceptual tools developed for social and cultural analysis to create accounts of intersectionally gendered practices and relationships involved in textile making. It will show how we can trace the dynamics of gender and hierarchies of production, trade, and consumption whether studying domestic karbas or globally traded carpets, recovering and analysing the presence and agency of subaltern groups. This allows us not only to enrich our understanding of textile making and use but also to challenge the silences around and /or the marginalisation of such groups.

The Rise of Qajar Rule in Gilan: A Merchants' Revolt?

by Kevin Gledhill / Sacred Heart University, Department of History / gledhillk@sacredheart.edu

This paper examines the transition in Gilan from local autonomy to integration into the emerging Qajar polity from 1779 to 1786. Rather than approaching this transformation from the perspective of ruling elites, the paper prioritizes the role of merchants in facilitating the establishment of Qajar authority. It argues that the region's autonomous ruler, Hedayat-Allah Khan, depended on the consent of merchants who operated between Rasht and Astrakhan. These traders mediated between local elites and the Russian consulate in Anzali. When silk production and trades were disrupted by invasions from Talesh and Tarom after the death of Karim Khan Zand, Hedayat-Allah Khan's relationship with the merchants collapsed due to his desperation for revenue, which he extracted from the merchants in violation of the treaties of the 1730s. Using a combination of early Qajar narrative histories and correspondence from the Russian consulate, the paper explores a series of confrontations between the merchants and the Khan, culminating in their calls for Russian military action and secret negotiations with the Qajars that led to the Khan's downfall and death at Anzali in 1786.

While this paper does engage with questions of elite politics, it seeks to recover voices other than those of tribal elites, the bureaucracy, and the 'ulema that dominate the literature on the post-Safavid era. It argues for the essential role of trans-Caspian merchants in shaping politics and the often-fluid allegiances they built. In the process, the paper contributes to the larger conference themes of Iran's borderlands and expatriate communities by addressing the political influence of merchant houses that connected Iran to the Volga along the maritime frontiers of the Caspian Sea.

Peasants, Peddlers, and Purveyors in the Social History of Opium in Qajar Iran

by Ranin Kazemi / San Diego State University / ranin.kazemi@gmail.com

This paper examines the social history of opium in Qajar Iran, tracing how a substance with deep historical roots became a defining feature of everyday life and local economies. Although opium had been known in Iran since antiquity and was widely consumed for medicinal and recreational purposes by the Safavid era, the nineteenth century marked a decisive transformation. Two key developments shaped this shift: the large-scale cultivation of opium for export to China, Europe and elsewhere, and the introduction of smoking as a novel and communal mode of consumption.

By the mid-nineteenth century, opium cultivation expanded dramatically, integrating Iranian agriculture and trade networks into Indian Ocean markets and creating new opportunities for production and exchange. This commercial growth drew in a wide range of participants across town and countryside. Landowners, peasants, and tenant farmers cultivated the poppy; exporters, brokers, and commission merchants moved the product to ports; and urban merchants, shopkeepers, and small-scale peddlers distributed it locally.

The paper analyzes these economic links and highlights how they intersected with everyday social and cultural practices. For example, smoking, more potent and communal than earlier methods of ingestion, fostered new forms of sociability and public leisure. Coffeehouses, teahouses, and private gatherings became important sites of consumption and conviviality. Poets, storytellers, musicians, and entertainers incorporated opium-related imagery and experience into their art, reflecting its deepening presence in the cultural imagination.

Drawing on a variety of Persian and non-Persian contemporary sources, this study reveals how opium became woven into the rhythms of Qajar society—from agricultural labor to urban entertainment—while retaining its long-standing medicinal and recreational roles. By focusing on the lived experiences of those who produced, traded, and consumed opium, the paper illuminates how a globally traded commodity became locally embedded, shaping the social fabric of nineteenth-century Iran.

Room 1.11

68. Translating Identities: Iranian Jews Between Community, Nation, and Diaspora

Chair: Lior Sternfeld, Isabelle Headrick

How have Iranian Jews navigated the complex terrain between Jewish communal belonging, Iranian national citizenship, and transnational diaspora connections? This panel examines Iranian Jewish experiences of mediation and translation—both literal and metaphorical—across four centuries, from early modern manuscript culture to 1940s Iran. By foregrounding sources that reveal Iranian Jewish perspectives often marginalized in national historiographies, these papers demonstrate how Iranian Jews have positioned themselves at critical intersections of multiple communities, languages, and political projects.

The panel opens with an analysis of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Judeo-Persian biblical translations from the Vecchietti Collection, revealing how educated Persian-speaking Jews used hyperliteral translation as a pedagogical tool to mediate between Hebrew sacred text and Persian vernacular. Moving to the twentieth century, our second presenter draws on Alliance Israélite Universelle correspondence to examine how Iranian Jews and French Jewish educators navigated World War I's devastating impact on Iran, illuminating the tensions between Orientalist frameworks and lived experiences of economic precarity and intercommunal anxiety.

The third panelist traces the shifting positionalities of Iranian Jewish journalists across the twentieth century, showing how figures like Shemu'el Hayyim, Manuchehr Omidvar, and Homa Sarshar negotiated between communal obligations, national citizenship, and ideological commitments—whether Zionist, leftist, or revolutionary. Finally, the fourth panelist focuses closely on the Iranian

Jewish press in the years 1944-1947, analyzing the ways that Zionist activists forged a uniquely Iranian form of Zionist identity in conversation with Iranian nationalism and Islam.
Together, these papers reveal enduring patterns in how Iranian Jews have operated as cultural mediators and identity translators. By examining manuscript circulation, institutional correspondence, journalism, and ideological formation, the panel demonstrates that Iranian Jewish history cannot be understood through singular frameworks of community, nation, or diaspora alone, but rather through the productive tensions and negotiations between them.

Cultural Friction and Mutual Support in Wartime: Iranian Jews and the Alliance Israélite Universelle During World War I

by Isabelle Headrick / Assistant Professor of Instruction, Schusterman Center for Jewish Studies, University of Texas at Austin / isabelle.headrick@austin.utexas.edu

On December 4, 1914, Abraham Elnékavé, the director of a Jewish school in Hamadan, wrote to his superiors that "severe crises are currently ravaging business, and our fellow Jews, who are all merchants, suffer as a result. Banks have withdrawn their credit, and goods such as sugar, coffee, petrol, etc. are now only sold for cash. The price of fabrics has almost doubled...Due to Turkey's entry into the war, unsettling rumors have been circulating in the city. We must hope that nothing will happen during this month of Moharram, when fanaticism runs high among the crowds."
How did Iranian Jews experience World War I? What were the factors that shaped their ability to earn a living, to learn in school, and to keep their families safe and in good health? Although Iran was not a combatant in World War I, it suffered from enormous damage that led to starvation and disease. Yet we have little perspective on the war from the vantage point of its religious minorities, and we have little information that sheds light on the day-to-day experiences of children and the people who worked with them.
This paper draws from the correspondence of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, a plentiful, rich, and under-utilized source about life in twentieth-century Iran. This material requires careful analysis, as its primary correspondents—school directors and young assistant directors—frequently deployed Orientalist tropes about Iranian Jews and Muslims alike. At the same time, the letters provide a vivid picture of life on the ground as experienced by ordinary Iranians and give us valuable perspective on the political turmoil, economic precarity, anxiety about the potential for specifically Iranian forms of anti-Jewish violence, and the feeling of being at the mercy of conflicts that were distant yet that penetrated into provincial cities and local communities.

The Iranian Jewish Journalist between the Communal, National, and Ideological

by Daniel Amir / Amherst College / daniel.d.amir@gmail.com

From the nineteenth century on, print culture was a key means for minority groups to negotiate their relationships with multiple discourses of identity in Iran. From early missionary-sponsored journals and constitutional nationalist visions, to movements of the Left and the Iranian Revolution, print allowed for a porous political environment in which to process change. Here, the community members and journalists alike could shape their visibility in the public sphere and bring together divergent visions of self. Yet the category of journalist in itself shifted considerably over the course of the twentieth century between three key positionalities that this paper will outline: the communal, the national, and the ideological.
The paper will examine Jewish journalists' engagement with their role in the press. It will compare the unfolding biographies and self-representations of journalists including Shemu'el Hayyim, Manuchehr Omidvar, Homa Sarshar and their colleagues, exploring their attitudes and responsibilities facing Jews, Iranians, and others. It will argue that, while often analyzed at times along chronological or ideological lines, a salient lens that is sometimes ignored is an understanding

of the function of the journalist themself. It will show that Zionist journalists could be inwardly focussed or committed to the mass-market Pahlavi press, that revolutionary or leftist writers could serve as equal parts anthropologist and ideologue, and that mainstream columnists could become diasporic symbols. That understanding, in turn, grants invaluable insight into the scale on which communal politicization could be imagined under the various pressures of their times.

Judeo-Persian Translations of the Bible from the Vecchietti Collection at the Bibliothèque nationale de France

by Jason Mokhtarian / Cornell University / jmokhtarian@cornell.edu

This presentation focuses on a collection of sixteen manuscripts of Judeo-Persian translations (tafsirs) of the Hebrew Bible housed in the Bibliothèque nationale de France that were originally acquired by the Florentine collector Giovambattista Vecchietti during his travels to Persia and India from 1600-1608 CE. This huge collection, sometimes called the "Paris Bible," totals over 1,700 folio pages and contains translations of nearly every biblical book (and some Apocrypha and Midrash), often in multiple witnesses. In addition, the Bibliothèque nationale de France also owns four manuscripts (Supplément persan 1-4) with transliterations into Perso-Arabic script of some of the Judeo-Persian tafsirs. The latter were produced by Vecchietti with the help of a native team of experts while in Persia and India, including while he was a guest of the Moghul Emperor Akbar the Great. Motivated by his own religious fervor, Vecchietti sought to preserve and make accessible these traditions to the Western world, gifting one of them to the Pope upon his return. All of these works are of enormous value to Iranian linguists, as they contain many archaisms, as well as to scholars of medieval Jewish translation/exegesis, since they represent an idiosyncratic tradition that is rarely included in studies on that subject. In my presentation, I analyze the hyperliteral, verbatim system of translation seen in many (although not all) of these Judeo-Persian tafsirs by comparing their contents closely with the original biblical text and other cognate Judeo-Persian translations (e.g., the British Library and Vatican Pentateuchs). In doing so, I show how these translations were intended to be read alongside the original Biblical Hebrew text as pedagogical tools to facilitate the comprehension of scripture by educated Persian-speaking Jews.

The Question of Jewish Iranian Zionist Identity in Iran, 1944–1947

by Sarah Nehzati / Freie University Berlin, Humboldt University Berlin / Seyyedesara.nehzati@fu-berlin.de

The mainstream historiography of Zionism is either a historiography of European Zionists or of Sephardic Jews from a European perspective. But how was Zionism adopted by non-European Jews? And to what extent did it clash with nationalistic ideologies embraced by Mizrahi Jews?

My paper examines how Iranian Zionist Jews between 1944 and 1947 shaped and promoted their identity in relation to both Zionism and Iranian nationalism. The main sources are three newspapers published by Jewish Iranian Zionists: Rahnama-ye Yahud, Israel, and Alam-e Yahud. One hundred issues were thoroughly examined, including advertisements, images, and non-political articles. In addition, interviews from the Oral Center for Jewish History with the editors and contributors illustrate how this identity was demonstrated through publications and organizational activities simultaneously.

The findings reveal a dual strategy to shape and promote the Zionist Iranian identity. First, Zionist activists embedded Jewishness within Iranian nationalism by invoking nostalgia for Cyrus the Great and the Achaemenid Empire, shared symbols for Jews and Iranian nationalists. This was achieved not only through passionate articles but also through theatre plays about Cyrus and by naming organizations after him. Strengthening ties with Iranian identity also involved highlighting similarities between Islam and Judaism, and the history of coexistence among their followers.

The second strategy was undoing over-assimilation by encouraging and facilitating Hebrew learning, urging the audience to stop using Muslim names for their children, and introducing Jewish cultural figures worldwide, thereby promoting a sense of communal distinctiveness within Iran and forming a stronger cultural connection with the wider Jewish community. In this context, as explicitly stated in the newspapers, Zionism is necessary, but mainly for European Jews with no place to go post-Holocaust.
By analyzing these strategies, the paper demonstrates how Iranian Jews localized Zionism and contributes to a non-Eurocentric intellectual historiography of nationalism and Zionism.

Iranian Jews and the Making of Tehrangeles
by Lior Sternfeld / Penn State / lbs18@psu.edu
The 1979 Revolution in Iran prompted the establishment of a new diaspora community in the United States, especially in Southern California. Shortly after the revolution, tens of thousands of Iranians, mostly from the middle and upper-middle classes, fled the country and resettled in the US. The high concentration of Iranians in the area of Los Angeles granted the area the unofficial name (later became official) of Tehrangeles. Among them, there was a large contingent of Iranian Jews, who had become part of the urban middle class in the previous three decades.
The arrival in Southern California was not smooth. Against the backdrop of the Hostage Crisis in Iran, the hysteria and anxiety, and open hatred towards Iranians, the new migrants tried to make a home for themselves while maintaining neat community structures. The Iranians, in general, tried to form Iranian spaces to include most of the social groups, the Iranian-Jews established further institutions to cater for their own group, while building invisible walls between them and the non-Iranian, mostly Ashkenazi-liberal American Jewish community of LA. This process was accompanied by the creation and adoption of new diasporic Persian identities inspired by “renewed” collective memory.
This presentation will analyze the wave that was unprecedented in both its Iranian and American contexts. The diasporic culture that remained connected to the Iranian society in Iran and abroad, yet had a distinct function in the diaspora. The paper will discuss the creation of Iranian spaces, enclaves, and the long-unprocessed trauma. Additionally, the talk will focus on the dynamics between the Jews and non-Jews, and between Iranian Jews and American Jews.

Room 1.15

69. New Perspectives on Endangered Iranian Languages of Eastern Transcaucasia and Central Asia

Chair: Hakob Avchyan

This panel brings together scholars working on endangered Iranian languages of Eastern Transcaucasia and Central Asia, exploring their grammatical structures, contact histories, and typological developments. Despite a long tradition of research, many aspects of these languages remain underdescribed, and their internal variation, historical layering, and interaction with neighboring non-Iranian languages are only beginning to be systematically investigated.
The papers in this panel address a range of morphosyntactic and diachronic questions, examining how processes of convergence, innovation, and preservation have shaped the current linguistic profile of the region. Drawing on new field data and comparative evidence, the contributors analyze domains such as verbal morphology, possession, and aspect, illustrating how local contact situations have generated unique structural outcomes. Special attention is given to the interaction between inherited Iranian features and contact-induced change, with case studies drawn from languages such as Caucasian Tat, Northern Talyshi, and Yaghnobi.
By combining descriptive, typological, and historical perspectives, the panel aims to illuminate both the diversity and the interconnectedness of these linguistic traditions. The discussions highlight broader mechanisms of grammatical change, the sociolinguistic pressures driving endangerment, and the methodological challenges of documenting small, multilingual communities. In doing so, the

panel offers new perspectives on how endangered Iranian languages contribute to our understanding of contact phenomena, areal convergence, and the evolution of linguistic diversity across Eastern Transcaucasia and Central Asia.

Who Owns What? Possessive Constructions in Northern Talyshi (Anbarāni and Lankarani Dialects)
by Hakob Avchyan / Department of Iranian Studies, Yerevan State University (Armenia)
/ hakob.avchyan@gmail.com
This study investigates the expression of possession in Northern Talyshi, a Northwestern Iranian language mainly spoken in the Republic of Azerbaijan and also found in northern Iran. The analysis is based on original fieldwork data and textual material. Possession in Northern Talyshi has received little systematic attention: previous studies have briefly touched upon attributive constructions while virtually ignoring predicative ones.
The paper distinguishes and compares two domains: (i) attributive possession, realized primarily through the oblique case of the possessor—optionally preceded by the preposition čə—and through possessive pronouns; and (ii) predicative possession, expressed by enclitic pronouns and the existential verb heste ‘to exist’.
Whereas attributive possession has been examined to some extent (Miller 1953; Schulze 2000; Paul 2011), predicative possession has received almost no dedicated treatment. Mohammadirad (2020) briefly classifies Northern Talyshi among the “be”-verb Western Iranian languages that employ an existential predicate rather than a transitive have-verb. Building on this observation, the present paper offers a detailed dialectal account of both attributive and predicative possession, filling an empirical and typological gap.
In Lankarani, the possessor appears in the oblique case, the possessee is indexed by enclitic pronouns, and possession is encoded through heste. In contrast, Anbarāni employs the postposition ro (cf. Persian rā) to mark the possessor, again with heste. Some Anbarāni examples combine both strategies. The paper further considers whether the Lankarani pattern reflects Turkic (Azerbaijani) influence, while the Anbarāni ro-construction represents an indigenous Iranian development, or whether both continue an inherited Iranian model.
By documenting and comparing these two endangered dialects, the paper contributes to the panel “New Perspectives on Endangered Iranian Languages of Eastern Transcaucasia and Central Asia”, illustrating how microvariation in morphosyntax informs our understanding of contact, convergence, and typological change in the Iranian area.

The Yaghnobi Mirror to the Sogdian 'Have-Perfect': Preliminary Observations
by Iskandar Ding / SOAS University of London / iskandar.x.ding@gmail.com
The Sogdian periphrastic perfect is formed with the past participle and an auxiliary – the copula for intransitive clauses or δʾr ‘to have, hold’ for transitive clauses. It is the most common expression of the aspectuo-temporal category of the preterite in direct speech (Yoshida 2009). Although δʾr is rare in the oldest attested Sogdian documents, it is gradually generalised to be the predominant auxiliary for the periphrastic perfect regardless of transitivity in later stages of the language (Wendtland 2011). Such a ‘have-perfect’ also exists in Khwarezmian.
A similar have-perfect is not found in Yaghnobi, the only surviving descendant of an unattested variety of Sogdian. Yet there is evidence to suggest that a perfect of the possessive type may have existed and continues to exist in the language. The Yaghnobi post-terminal – including the present perfect and the past perfect (pluperfect) – is expressed with the past participle and a copular auxiliary. While the present perfect uses the identificational/attributional copula across the board, the past perfect tends to use the past form oy of the existential copular ast in transitive clauses and the past forms of the identificational/attributional copula in intransitive clauses.

In Yaghnobi, possession is expressed not with the lexical verb dor ‘to hold’, but with the existential copula, plus the possessor in the oblique case (Bird 2007; Benkato 2019). As the agent of transitive post-terminal clauses in Yaghnobi is also in the oblique form, the use of the existential copula as the past perfect transitive auxiliary may effectively be seen as a possessive construction akin to the Sogdian have-perfect.
This paper seeks to illustrate this previously unaddressed topic with examples from the currently available printed Yaghnobi material, collected or composed over the last 100 years, arguing that the aforementioned phenomenon may be a remnant of a more rigorous and systematic possessional perfect in the history of Yaghnobi.

Tracing the origins of the different converb systems in the dialects of Caucasian Tat
by Artyom Tonoyan / Yerevan State University / artyom.tonoyan@ysu.am
Although the documentation of Caucasian Tat (CT), spoken in Eastern Transcaucasia, began in the mid-nineteenth century and continues to this day, resulting in the accumulation of a tangible corpus and a considerable number of studies (Tonoyan & Voskanian 2024), a number of issues have remained understudied.
This is particularly true of problems that, on the one hand, concern the need for a deeper examination of divergences among the dialects of this language and for identifying the distinctive features of their historical development, and, on the other hand, involve questions that require a comprehensive investigation of contact-induced innovations.
In light of the aforementioned gaps, the present paper aims to examine the “converb systems” attested in various CT dialects (Table 1) and, by applying both synchronic and diachronic approaches, to propose explanations for their emergence.
This paper seeks to demonstrate that the diversity of the “converb systems” in CT cannot be explained solely by Azerbaijani superstratal influence (e.g. Suleymanov 2020: 155). Although such an explanation may be plausible in certain cases, among them the innovative infinitive + ačaq / oncoq form first discussed here, it is insufficient for other types, where contact-induced change cannot alone account for the observed developments.
The analysis is based on comparative material drawn from thirteen dialectal versions of the same folkloric text, documented during 2012–2015 through remote fieldwork, as well as from the entire published corpus of Caucasian Persian texts available to date.
Table 1. Converb systems in the dialects of Caucasian Tat
Type 1 infinitive + -i Düzbilici (Shabran)
Type 2 b(a-) + infinitive + -(i) Upper Shirvan, Afurja (Quba)
Type 3 infinitive + -gun Absheron, Xizi
Type 4 infinitive + -kina Madrasa (Shamakhi)
Type 5 infinitive + -a Kilvar (Shabran)
Type 6 infinitive + -ačaq / - onǰoq Rustov, Pusteqasim, Isnov, Chichi (Quba)

Room 1.16

70. The Eloquent Body: Rewriting Love, Gender, and Eroticism in Indo-Persian Narratives

Chair: Mehdi Sham Roshan

This panel explores the intricate and frequently conflicting representations of gender, power, and virtue in medieval Indo-Persian literary traditions. Even though the literature of the time seemed to uphold the conventional but dynamic ways that gender and authority were represented, it was also an important place to negotiate and break these conventions. The papers on this panel analyze how gender and female characters become discursive sites of allegory, translation, and critique in Amīr Khusraw’s Deval Rānī Khiẓr Khān (c. 1315), Ẓiyāʾ al-Dīn Nakhshabī’s Tūṭīnāma, Jami’s Haft Awrang, and Mīr Jaʿfar Zaṭallī’s Zaṭalnāma. These studies reveal a consistent pattern of textual destabilization,

where female characters are granted narrative agency and political significance. For instance, Deval Rānī Khiẓr Khān transforms its protagonist's suffering into a potent allegory for imperial instability and compromised sovereignty. Similarly, the Tūṭīnāma reconfigures Indic narrative traditions to probe questions of moral ambiguity and pleasure through the framework of female storytelling. Furthermore, the paper on Jāmī's Haft Awrang (Seven Thrones) reveals that female figures operate as complex discursive vehicles for political counsel, moral critique, and Sufi pedagogy. It demonstrates that the fluid and dynamic deployment of gender is central to Timurid literary and ethical discourse. Lastly, the Zaṭalnāma uses gendered discourse as the main vehicle for societal critique by weaponizing witty and sexually explicit language as a form of political satire. Taken together, these studies illuminate Indo-Persian literature as a field marked by the convergence of love, gender, and authority. In tracing the various ways authors mobilized the female form—as political allegory, narrative conduit, or site of subversion—this panel offers a nuanced understanding of the negotiations between gender and power that animated the Persianate imagination.

In Between Problem and Protest: Employing Sexually Reductive Language against an Authoritarian Regime

by Shubham Goswami / University of Heidelberg, Germany / shubhamgoswami.sg59@gmail.com

This paper explores the language and interpretive strategies of Mīr Jaʿfar Zaṭallī's Zatalnāmā, situating his work as a politically subversive text that simultaneously critiques and reproduces structures of domination. Zaṭallī's use of coarse and sexually explicit language functioned as a vehicle of protest against Emperor Farrukhsiyar's (r. 1713-1719) imperial decadence; yet, its reliance on sexual objectification complicates its moral and political stance. Drawing upon textual evidence, this study interrogates the tension between protest—the demand for political accountability—and problem—the deployment of sexually reductive discourse.

Beyond literary analysis, the paper asks whether Zaṭallī's deliberate vulgarity represents "impotence" in the face of authoritarianism, a calculated act of dissent, or a symbolic struggle for power between two men. Furthermore, it foregrounds early anthologists' identification of the genre's (hazl) exploitation of women as the central "object of vulgarization," which conflicted with the emerging moral sensibilities of "modern" literature and contributed to the genre's decline. Through these analytical frameworks, the study reevaluates the Zaṭalnāmāh as a complex site of social critique shaped by the intersection of political necessity and gendered ethics.

Pedagogy of the Body and Polity of the Soul: The Female Figure in Jāmī's Haft Awrang

by Farinaz Kavianifar / https://ephe.academia.edu/FarinazKavianifar / farinazkaviani@gmail.com

This paper argues that in Abd-al-Raḥmān Jāmī's (d. 1492) Haft Awrang (Seven Thrones), female figures operate as complex discursive vehicles for political counsel, moral critique, and Sufi pedagogy. Through a close reading of three poetic clusters of Haft Awrang, this study demonstrates that the fluid and dynamic deployment of gender is central to Timurid literary and ethical discourse.

The analysis examines "Salamān and Absāl," where the narrative of disciplining erotic desire provides a pedagogical model for princely rule, equating the governance of passion with the governance of the realm. Next, it investigates "Yūsuf and Zulaykhā," tracing Zulaykhā's transformation from a desiring agent to a sanctified spouse to show how female desire is recoded as an instrument of sovereignty, confession, and ethical legibility. Finally, the paper considers exemplary tales from "Subḥat al-Abrār" (Rosary of the Righteous) and "Silsilat al-Dhahab" (Golden Chain), where women's frank, and often coarse, admonitions function as potent tools for social satire and moral adjudication. By foregrounding these varied representations, this study reveals the multifaceted role of gender in Jāmī's mathnawīs and establishes its critical function within the broader landscape of Timurid literary and ethical traditions.

Methodologically, the paper combines close reading with the mirrors for princes tradition. The dynamic female figure portrayed in Jāmī's oeuvre traces how gendered bodies carry arguments about authority, justice, piety, and pleasure. Situating these representations within Timurid concerns for dynastic stability, public piety, and the governance of the self, the analysis shows how Jāmī turns gender into a medium of translation between court politics and Sufi interiority.

The Body as a Political Text: Sovereignty and Suffering in Amir Khusraw's Deval Rānī Khiẓr Khān
by Mehdi Sham Roshan / I am a researcher and historian of Indo-Persian literature, culture, and religion. My work examines the intersections of Persian and South Asian intellectual traditions, focusing on approaches that integrate literary studies, religious history, and manuscript culture, contributing to broader conversations on Islamicate societies and South Asian cultural history. / mehdishamroshan@gmail.com
Amīr Khusraw's historical mathnawī, Deval Rānī Khiẓr Khān (1315), is often read as a tragic romance chronicling the tragic love between a Hindu princess and a Muslim prince. This paper moves beyond such generic classifications to argue that Amīr Khusraw strategically employs the body of the female protagonist as a potent allegory for the political and moral crises of the late Khaljī Sultanate (1290–1320). Through a close reading of the text, I contend that Deval Rani's physical and emotional journey—from her initial capture as a spoil of war to her violent suffering during Khiẓr Khān's murder and her subsequent forced possession by his usurpers—functions as a powerful political metaphor. Her body becomes a contested text upon which the violence of conquest, imperial instability, and the desecration of legitimate rule are inscribed. This analysis posits that in immortalizing Deval Rani's trauma, Amīr Khusraw offers not merely a lament but a sophisticated critique of the political order that commissioned his work. In his portrayal, the female body becomes both a symbol of imperial authority and a site of its deepest violence. This rereading repositions the poem from a simple romance to a complex work of political commentary.

Feminine Wiles, Authorial Hands: Gender Dialectics in Nakhshabi's Ṭuṭināma
by Sajedeh Hosseini / University of Arizona / sajedehhosseini@arizona.edu
This paper explores the gendered poetics of Nakhshabi's Ṭuṭināma, a Persian reworking of the Sanskrit Shukasaptati that circulated widely. While the text is commonly placed within the "Wiles of Women" (makr-e zanān) tradition, it seems to perpetuate established misogynistic narrative patterns: a wayward wife, a watchful male narrator, and didactic couplets that idealize a world free from feminine guile. Yet instead of simply repeating these conventions, the text negotiates them and complicates the moral binaries that organize the work.
The parrot's nightly storytelling, while Maymun is away, constructs a homosocial pact that polices female desire while revealing the narrator's own tactic of deception. The parrot's trickery, which is portrayed in masculine terms, in contrast to the feminized starling, reflects the very ruse condemned in women and troubles the work's moral asymmetry. At the same time, prose sections surrounding Khojasta, suggest moments of sympathy that complicate the couplets, as Nakhshabi's voice moves between condemnation and imaginative identification.
By situating the text within Persianate literary exchange, this paper examines further nuances within its gendered scripts. Such association may suggest that the Ṭuṭināma's portrayal of women's wit, speech, and mobility as both enticing and dangerous. That said, I argue that the Ṭuṭināma intensifies male-control fantasies and female punishment even as it relies on women's actions to drive the plot and produce narrative delight. Tracing these tensions shows the text to be more than a transmitter of misogynistic topoi; it is a site of gender negotiation through translation, adaptation, and transregional exchange.

71. Persian Literary Domination and Vernacular Resistance: Case Studies from Kurdish, Baluchi, Pashto and Shughni

Chair: Michiel Leezenberg

The marginalization and oppression of vernaculars, or 'minority languages,' like Kurdish, Pashto, Baluchi and Shughni, in and by modern nation states is well known and well documented; but already in early modern times, one encounters both a literary domination of these vernaculars by literary Persian, and processes of vernacularization, that is, the rise of vernacular languages to a new literate and literary status, in clear and self-conscious acts of resistance or rebellion against this domination.

This panel thematizes the domination of the Persian literary language in early modern and modern times. In doing so, it addresses the recently popular notions of the 'Persianate' (introduced by Marshall Hodgson) and 'Persian cosmopolitan' (following Sheldon Pollock) from the margins as a wider cultural or civilizational sphere. The enormous influence of works like Nizami's Layla and Majnun, Rumi's Masnavi and Saadi's Golestan has long been known; but it has never been properly theorized, and has tacitly been assumed to be a matter of purely literary quality. It may also be analyzed, however, as a premodern form of what Pierre Bourdieu and Pascale Casanova call literary domination: a form of symbolic power that cannot be reduced to state power or economic domination. A focus on early modern and modern Persian literary domination – and on resistance against it – will add a greater time depth and geographical coverage to Bourdieu's and Casanova's analyses, which focus on the modern world and on the domination of Western literary languages like English, French and Spanish. It has both a methodological and a political dimension: Persian and Iranian Studies have long taken Persian literary domination for granted, but in doing so, they risk tacitly legitimizing it and reproducing the very marginalization of vernacular languages that has accompanied it.

The process of standardizing the Shughni language and the policy towards minority languages in Tajikistan

by Zuzanna Blajet / University of Warsaw / zuzablajet@gmail.com

Shughni is classified as non-literate and is spoken in countries where other Iranian languages with officially recognized and well-documented literary histories predominate — namely, Tajik in Tajikistan, and Dari and Pashto in Afghanistan. In Tajikistan, despite considerable linguistic diversity, particularly in the Badakhshan region, Tajik remains the sole official language and the only one which should dominate in public spaces.

In the late 1970s, linguistic communities in Tajik Badakhshan intensified efforts to develop a grammatical and orthographic framework for the Shughni language. However, the process of standardizing and disseminating knowledge about Shughni grammar and writing conventions has been repeatedly interrupted by top-down political decisions. In recent years, the central government's increasingly restrictive policies toward the Pamiri minority in Badakhshan have led to the suspension of initiatives aimed at formalizing the Shughni language and have further reinforced the promotion of Tajik in the region.

In this context, the article addresses two main issues. First, it explores the question of linguistic norms in non-literate languages, focusing on the use of Shughni in written form. The analysis draws on a limited number of literary sources, including the only novel written in Shughni, as well as transcriptions of folkloric texts. Particular attention is paid to the grammatical and orthographic consistency of these texts in relation to linguistic descriptions available in scholarly works.

Second, the article examines the role of digital space as a contemporary platform that enables literary expression in Shughni and facilitates the documentation of other forms of linguistic and

cultural heritage associated with the Pamiri community, which can now be more freely disseminated through digital means.

Beyond Persian: Reclaiming Afghanistan's Vernacular Histories.
by Mateusz Klagisz / Jagiellonian University / joanna.bochenska@kurdishstudies.pl
For a long time, the study of Afghanistan's past has rested mostly on Persian-language sources: court chronicles, official correspondence, and literary histories produced within the Persianate orbit of state power. This body of material is invaluable, but it represents only one stratum of Afghanistan's historical consciousness: the elite, urban, and bureaucratic. Beneath and beside it lie vast vernacular archives in Pashto, Baluchi, and other local languages that preserve alternative visions of society, territory, and belonging.
These non-central languages are not mere dialects; they are repositories of political imagination. Pashto epic poetry, tribal genealogies, and moral proverbs encode local conceptions of justice and governance often absent from Persian documents. Baluchi songs, migration tales, and oral chronicles trace transborder connections that challenge the bounded, state-centered histories written in Kabul. Together, they offer a view of Afghanistan as a mosaic of interwoven worlds rather than a monolingual state with a single narrative voice.
Recovering these perspectives is not an antiquarian exercise but an act of historiographical resistance to Persian literary and epistemic domination. To read only in Persian is to reproduce the social hierarchies that marginalized speakers of other tongues. A genuinely inclusive Afghan historiography must recognize Pashto, Baluchi, and other local sources as co-equal to Persian ones - foundational, not auxiliary, to understanding how people in different regions and social strata experienced power, identity, and belonging. In doing so, this paper situates Afghanistan's vernacular traditions within broader patterns of resistance to Persian literary hegemony across the Persianate world.

Classical Kurdish Poetry as Subaltern World Literature: The Case of Ehmedê Xanî's Mem û Zîn
by M.M. Leezenberg / University of Amsterdam / m.m.leezenberg@uva.nl
Literary domination, as theorized by Bourdieu and Casanova, has been studied predominantly in Western contexts, and almost exclusively in the specifically modern settings of the nation state and of the transnational capitalist world market. In this contribution, I will discuss how we can thematize this form of domination in a non-modern and non-Western setting, viz., the premodern or early modern Persianate cultural or civilizational sphere. I will do so by focusing on one vernacular mathnawi poem, Ehmedê Xanî's Mem û Zîn, written in Kurmancî or Northern Kurdish in the late seventeenth century CE. Although this poem is overtly mystical in content, it has been redefined, and consecrated, as the Kurdish national epic in the twentieth century; in more recent years it has also been claimed as a work of world literature.
Xanî is well aware of his Persianate context. His poem is shot through with Persian loan words, and clearly inspired by Nizami's Layli and Majnun and Jami's Yusuf and Zulaykha; in the poem's dîbaçe, the importance of these two poets is explicitly acknowledged. At the same time, Xanî consciously revolts against the dominance of the Persian literary language: instead of singing the praise of discourse (sukhan) in the abstract, he explains at length why he writes in Kurdish, figuratively calling his doing so an act of bid'et, that is, heresy.
In my paper, I will discuss exactly what this heresy amounts to, and in what way, or ways, we may read Mem û Zîn as an example of subaltern world literature. Hopefully, a greater attention to vernacular literary traditions like that of classical Kurdish poetry will increase awareness of the power effects of the prestige of New Persian as a literary language, a topic that has not yet sufficiently been thematized in Persian and Iranian Studies.

72. Speculative Iran: Between haunting and futurity

Chair: Babak Rahimi

This panel explores “Iran” as an anticipatory constellation of practices grounded in possibility and imagination, reconfiguring both ghostly pasts—which bind memory and potentiality—and emergent forms of futurity to articulate what may be called “Speculative Iran.” Bringing interdisciplinary approaches into dialogue with artistic and cultural case studies, the panel demonstrates how diverse modes of communication shape affect and attention, constituting expressive sociabilities that enable speculative action. It examines how Iran emerges as an anticipatory project—sustained by spectral pasts, desired futures, and contested possibilities of being and becoming Iranian. The first paper, “Uprising of the Thirsty: Speculative Mourning and the Afterlives of Water in Iran’s Environmental Protests,” shows how environmental activism in Khuzestan transforms drought into a register of political grief. Drawing on the ritual grammar of Shi‘i mourning, it reads ecological loss as a speculative archive linking collective lament to futurity. The second paper, “Chronic Refusal: Chronic Bodies as Transnational Figures of Resistance across 19th-Century Iran and the Americas,” extends the speculative lens across colonial and transnational contexts. Reinterpreting “chronicity” as both a medical and political category, the paper reveals how bodies and ecologies refuse imperial incorporation, illuminating solidarities that challenge Western definitions of human vitality. The third paper, “Haunting Futures: Folk Horror and Collective Paranoia in Arsalan Amiri’s Zalava (2021),” turns to cinema to identify haunting and belief as speculative affects in the postrevolutionary imagination. Through the film’s fusion of folklore and political allegory, the paper reads haunting as an anticipatory mode—revealing Iran as a space suspended between unrealized futures and spectral histories. Together, the three papers propose a new lexicon for thinking about Iran in the “not yet,” reimagined through speculative practices that move beyond linear histories while remaining animated by haunting pasts and open futures.

Haunting Futures: Folk Horror and Collective Paranoia in Arsalan Amiri’s Zalava (2021)

by Maryam Ghorbankarimi / Lancaster University / m.ghorbankarimi@lancaster.ac.uk

This paper reads Arsalan Amiri’s Zalava (2021) through the lens of the panel’s concept of “Speculative Iran,” exploring how the film reimagines collective belief, superstition, and paranoia as speculative acts that connect past and future forms of Iranian identity. Set in a Kurdish village on the eve of the 1979 Revolution, Zalava merges folk horror and political allegory to reveal the spectral persistence of fear and mistrust that continues to haunt Iranian modernity. The villagers’ conviction that a jinn plagues their community reflects not only inherited superstition but also the residual anxieties of historical trauma and displacement.

Drawing on Adam Scovell’s concept of the “folk horror chain” and Derrida’s hauntology, this paper argues that Zalava transforms folklore into a speculative vocabulary for imagining national consciousness. The unseen jinn functions as both a literal and metaphorical presence, a manifestation of the community’s internalised violence and uncertainty towards authority. The film’s isolated landscape and circular logic of fear evoke an Iran suspended between belief and scepticism, tradition and modernity. Within this temporal suspension, the village becomes a speculative space haunted by unrealised futures.

In dialogue with Mehrjui’s The Cow (1969), Zalava maps the continuity of collective dread from pre-revolutionary to contemporary Iran, revealing haunting as both a political affect and an anticipatory mode of being, a condition of living with the ghosts of what Iran was and what it might yet become.

Uprising of the Thirsty: Speculative Mourning and the Afterlives of Water in Iran’s Environmental Protests

by Bahar Abdi / University of California San Diego / abdi.bahar87@gmail.com

In July 2021, a woman in Iran's Khuzestān province confronted armed security forces during water protests, crying out in Arabic and Persian:
«مظاهرات سلمیه چرا آتش می‌زنی؟ کاملا سلمیه، چرا تیر می‌اندازی؟ تو که خاکتو نبردن، آبتو نبردن»
(Peaceful demonstration! Why are you opening fire? No one has taken your land, no one has taken your water…)
Her words, circulating widely on social media, became an unofficial anthem for a movement known as Qiyām-e Tashnegān (Uprising of the Thirsty), a movement that transformed drought into a register of political grief. This paper begins from that affective moment to explore how water protests in Khuzestān enact what I call speculative mourning–a set of cultural practices that mobilize grief not only to narrate ecological collapse but also to imagine more just futures. In this paper, I analyze how protestors draw on Shi'a ritual repertoires, especially the narrative of Karbalā, where Hossein and his companions were martyred after being denied water. The symbol of thirst ('atash) becomes a speculative archive: protest chants, songs, and imagery recast the Iranian state as Yazid, transforming water scarcity into a sacred injustice. Popular cultural texts, such as Mohsen Chavoshi's song Khuzestan (2018), further layer religious lamentation with sonic traces of war propaganda, forging a counter-narrative of environmental justice. By situating Khuzestān's water crisis within histories of state-led dispossession and Arab marginalization, I argue that these protests exceed resource politics. They reveal how grief, performed collectively, becomes a political claim and a speculative act. To mourn water is to reimagine solidarities across ethnic, ecological, and temporal divides. This paper contributes to the panel's theme by showing how "Speculative Iran" emerges through practices of mourning that transform slow violence into anticipatory action, fusing spectral pasts with contested futures.

Chronic Refusal: Chronic Bodies as Transnational Figures of Resistance across 19th Century Iran and the Americas
by Nilufar Karimi / UC San Diego / nikarimi@ucsd.edu
In 1891, Mary Bird, an untrained physician for the Church Mission Society (CMS) ran a clinic in Isfahan, Iran and characterized her patient Hamedeh as "chronic," not because of her medical condition, but because she refused medical treatment and religious conversion. Bird used this same adjective, "chronic," to describe the arid Alborz mountain range, or what she called, "waterless tracts of land." This paper engages Neel Ahuja's theory of "the body as a transitional theater of imperial warfare" (Bioinsecurities, 2016) to speculate on how the "chronic" body can be read as a transnational figure of resistance and refusal both in the 19th century and today. In this paper, I draw from patient records and letters across Isfahan and Metlakatla, Canada to argue that narratives of colonial failure to mobilize human and non-human life as weapons for expansion, and narratives of resistance against such mobilizations, work to decenter the Euro-Western paradigm of the nature-human divide, illuminating solidarities that challenge Western definitions of what it means to be human. Women in Isfahan and Metlakatla share stories of resistance against the CMS's erasure of traditional medicine and the rewriting of their lands as "chronically hostile" to one's health (Bird 1899). Because the CMS divided itself by gender in order to gain footholds in communities they entered, the stories of resistance in Isfahan and Metlakatla exemplify how across place the medicalized body—or the body that is made into a site of changeability and "treatment"—becomes a speculative site entangling place, race, gender, and sexuality. These intertwined histories shed light on how "Speculative Iran" was shaped alongside the Speculative Americas, and how chronic refusal continues to challenge violent definitions of who is and who is not "human."

Room 2.17

73. Working Around the Sanctions in and Around Iran
Chair: Moslem Ghomashlouyan

This panel brings together original papers that investigate how Iranian economic and financial actors have enacted various workarounds (or adjustments) to cope with the conditions of intensified external pressure, including sanctions. Anchored in a multiscalar framework and drawing on ethnographic investigations, the panel asks: how do practices of working around emerge across local, national, transnational, and international scales, and how do they reconfigure circulations of goods, capital, and value? The panel's papers illuminate how those external pressures reshape economic and social life not only through macroeconomics but also through everyday, gendered, and domestic practices. The panel's multiscalar approach spans from intimate, home-based economies and local markets to the national economy and transnational financial infrastructures. This range allows for a comparative understanding of how adjustments unfold across scales. The papers show that, although it is not surprising to see that in the face of conflicts, wars, restrictions, or sanctions, people work their way around them to continue their economic life, the ways in which those workaround practices unfold vary across the scales.
The first paper examines the social lives of informal trade and cryptocurrencies in and around sanctioned Iran, showing how traders and financial actors sustain transnational exchange through informality, smuggling, and new money technologies. By tracing cryptocurrency-enabled trade and investment practices, it demonstrates how workarounds to "sanctions territorialization" reconfigure cross-border economic life and link local actors to global circulations and financial systems.
The second paper explores women's online home-based businesses that have emerged amid sanctions. It highlights how women entrepreneurs transform the home into an economic space, negotiate scarcity, and mobilize informal networks to sustain livelihoods under external constraints.
The third paper focuses on the Tehran Stock Exchange, analyzing speculation as a "language-game" that bridges economic rationality and moral reasoning. By showing how lay investors navigate between political ethics and financial pragmatism, it reveals how sanctions reshape financial subjectivities and moralities within Iran's urban middle class.

Workarounds: Cryptocurrencies, Trade, and Leapfrogging in and around Sanctioned Iran
by Moslem Ghomashlouyan / University of Bern / moslem.ghomashlouyan@unibe.ch
This research examines the social lives of informal trade and cryptocurrencies as they relate to economic life and the transnational circulation of commodities and currencies in and around sanctioned Iran. My research asks: How have Iranian financial and economic actors, struggling with receiving export proceeds and the needed foreign merchandise, managed to sustain trade through smuggling and informality (qāchāq), and what role have cryptocurrencies started to play in that? Moreover, how have cross-class segments of Iranian society managed to advocate for themselves and their futures in Iran and mediate the effects of the loss of value stored in their national currency with cryptocurrencies despite sanctions? The aim is to examine how Iranians use historical and new economic experiments to work around sanctions, sustain trade, and secure livelihoods. My research focuses on cryptocurrency-enabled trade payments, investment practices, and what I term "leapfrogging," used here to describe bypassing conventional social-mobility paths for rapid gains through speculation with cryptocurrencies. These workaround practices point to what I call the qāchāqification of trade and economic life. Broadly, qāchāq denotes breaching contractual obligations across legal, economic, social, and political fields. Studying the qāchāqification of trade and economic life reveals how the informal underpins the formal, and how sanctioned economies rely on such workarounds in transnational circulations. Iranian trade and financial actors integrate cryptocurrency-related workarounds into everyday qāchāq practices to counter "sanctions territorialization," which curtails Iran's economic and political agency beyond its borders. Across class lines, many Iranians turn to cryptocurrencies to bypass steady employment, hedge against inflation and currency instability, and preserve savings and livelihoods. Methodologically, my research

employs multi-sited mobile ethnography to trace improvised infrastructures of sanctions-era trade and finance across the UAE, Oman and Iranian cities. It is complemented by digital ethnography and snowball sampling among Iranians who leapfrog through cryptocurrency trading.

Lingering hopes; Iranian women's multi-entrepreneurship and their negotiations of boundaries set by sanctions

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The purpose of this research is to investigate the emergence of women's online home-based businesses in the context of external economic sanctions in Iran. I draw on ethnographic research on women entrepreneurs' experience of the scarcity/inaccessibility of resources and analyze their strategies to adjust to the market as it goes through various forms of tensions. My aim is to elaborate on the ways women entrepreneurs negotiate the boundaries set by sanctions and carve out alternative spaces of opportunity. Instead of being entrapped, women use their multi-entrepreneurial skills to invent new strategies for generating an income.

With a focus on home, my research also asks how informal private spaces are rendered economically valuable in the time of economic sanctions. With the help of online applications such as Instagram, women invent strategies to adapt to an isolated economy. My research contributes to the field of anthropology of labor by exploring the ways entrepreneurial labor is organized and territorialized at home and what sort of relations and processes are informed when an isolated market connects to homes. Identifying the livelihood projects that are enabled when home emerge as a space of informality is a the center of my research.

Room 2.18

74. Reason, Revelation, and Revival: Esoteric Hermeneutics from Nāṣir-i Khusraw to Rūmī and the Present

Chair: Daryoush Mohammad Poor, Rahim Gholami

This panel examines how intellect (ʿaql), authority, and esoteric interpretation (taʾwīl) circulate between texts and social worlds in Iranian Islam. Combining literary analysis, intellectual history, political contextualization, and qualitative research, the papers show how "partial signs"—a Qurʾānic phrase, a poetic image, a doctrinal cue, or a survival tactic—can catalyse transformations in meaning and practice.

One paper offers a close reading of three loci in Rūmī's Mathnawī where Qurʾān 2:67–73 is reimagined (e.g., Mathnawī II 1390–1460; III 2306–2569; III 3790–3921). It argues that the command "smite him with part of it (bi-baʿḍihā)" becomes a method of esoteric pedagogy: partial, emblematic acts revive the heart, while love consummates the work of intellect and guidance. The analysis notes motifs such as the exposure of a hidden murder and the "cow of Hell," to illustrate how Rūmī stages scriptural fragments as catalysts of inner resurrection.

A second paper reassesses the balance of reason and revelation in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Jāmiʿ al-ḥikmatayn and Dīwān, showing that his "rationalism" is not autonomous but disciplined—anchored in prophetic–imamic authority. It situates Nāṣir-i Khusraw's epistemology alongside later readings and understudied Persian scholarship.

A third paper reconstructs the political world Nāṣir-i Khusraw encountered in Fatimid Egypt, aligning travel narrative and verse with contemporaneous chronicles. It traces rivalries and alliances among palace actors and regional powers, clarifying how praise, silence, and diplomacy operated amid drought, cancelled ḥajj, and vizierial contestation at the outset of the Imam-Caliph al-Mustanṣir bi-llāh's long reign.

A fourth paper turns to the present, analysing interviews with Ismaili women in Tehran and Mashhad blocked from tertiary education. Using empowerment and capabilities frameworks, it details

strategies—from informal learning to taqiyya—that redefine agency under constraint and exposes policy mechanisms (e.g., entrance-exam screening) that produced exclusion.
Together, the papers map continuities between esoteric hermeneutics and social worlds, suggesting that the "partial sign" is not only a textual device but also a lived strategy for navigating authority, knowledge, and survival.

Striking with Part of It: Rūmī's Re-readings of Qurʾān 2:67–73 in the Mathnawī
by Rahim Gholami / Rahim Gholami obtained his BSc in Translation Studies from Azad University, Mashhad, in 1995. The title of his BSc dissertation is: ʿAṭṭār the Physician of the Body and the Soul in the Conference of the Birds (Manṭiq al-Ṭayr). Later he joined the Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities (GPISH) at The Institute of Ismaili studies in 1999. In October 2002, he received his MSc in Translation Studies from Edinburgh University. The title of his MSc dissertation is: Translating Genre and the Discourses of Shams. Rahim graduated with a PhD in Arab and Islamic Studies from the University of Exeter in October 2021. The title of his PhD thesis is: The Wayfarer's Sojourn at the Banquet: The Hermeneutics of Nāṣir-e Khusraw's Esoteric Guidance. Dr Gholami's forthcoming publication is: The Banquet of the Brethren: An Ismaili Guide to Spiritual Hermeneutics, Part 1 (published Oct 2024): A Persian critical edition; and Part 2 (forthcoming): An Introduction to and a full English translation of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Khwān al-Ikhwān. / rahim.gholami@gmail.com
This paper examines how the Mathnawī repeatedly re-stages Qurʾān 2:67–73—the story of Moses and the Cow—in three narrative settings, using the Qurʾanic command "smite him with part of it (bi baʿḍihā)" (2:73) as a generative key for esoteric instruction. Through close reading of Nicholson's translation, I analyse Book II vv. 1390–1460; Book III vv. 2306–2569; and Book III vv. 3790–3921.
In Book II (1390–1460), a meditation on reliance and providence culminates in Rūmī's image of the murdered man revived "by the stroke of the cow's tail," which he immediately turns into an ethical imperative—"slaughter" the cow of the lower self—thus reframing 2:73 as a pedagogy of inner resurrection through emblematic, "partial" acts that awaken the heart.
In Book III (2306–2569), Rūmī dramatizes a dispute over a slaughtered cow brought before David. The judge's recourse to retreat and inspired discernment privileges divinely guided insight over forensic cleverness, aligning "bi baʿḍihā" with the way a sign, grasped in part, illuminates the whole. The episode thematizes the commerce between soul and intellect: reason must be schooled by illumination, yet illumination vindicates justice.
In Book III (3790–3921), Rūmī identifies "the cow of Moses" with the fleshly soul: only by sacrificing this "cow" can the lover raise the dead spirit to life. Here 2:73 becomes a blueprint for fanāʾ (dying before death) and spiritual rebirth, articulated through the language of love and ecstatic surrender.
Across these scenes, Rūmī's taʾwīl intersects Sufi and Shiʿi inflected hermeneutics: prophets, friends of God, and imāmological figures serve as living "signs" whose partial gestures catalyse total transformation. The paper argues that Rūmī's multi sited exegesis redefines "bi baʿḍihā" as a method of esoteric pedagogy—small, symbolic obediences that conduct seekers from legal narrative to unveiled meaning—while foregrounding the dynamic between authority, intellect, and love within Persianate Islamic thought.

Empowerment under Constraint: Ismaili Women's Responses to Educational Barriers in Iran
by Maryam Rezaee / The Institute of Ismaili Studies / mrezaee@iis.ac.uk
This paper examines the lived experiences of Ismaili women in urban Iran—specifically in Mashhad and Tehran—who were unable to access or complete tertiary education. While scholarship often foregrounds narratives of educational attainment among marginalized communities, this study shifts attention to those whose aspirations were obstructed by a complex interplay of structural and ideological barriers. Through in-depth interviews with affected women, the research highlights how

intersecting factors—religious discrimination, gender norms, economic hardship, and political exclusion—systematically curtailed their educational trajectories.
The study draws on Kabeer's framework of empowerment, Sen's capabilities approach, and intersectional feminist theory to analyse both the nature of these constraints and the women's adaptive strategies. A key structural obstacle was the national university entrance exam (concur), which—under the guise of academic merit—operated as a political screening tool. Additional pre-conditions and opaque vetting mechanisms were selectively applied to exclude individuals deemed ideologically misaligned with the Islamic Republic, disproportionately affecting minority groups such as Ismailis.
Despite these exclusions, the women demonstrated resilience through alternative strategies: engaging in informal education, private institution, pursuing vocational skills, and contributing to their communities through various available activities volunteer works. The practice of taqiyya (religious discretion) emerged as a critical survival tactic, enabling participants to navigate hostile public spaces while preserving personal and communal identity. These strategies reflect not passive resignation but active negotiation within constrained circumstances.
While denied formal credentials, participants asserted agency in reimagining empowerment beyond institutional education. Nonetheless, the long-term impacts of exclusion—including restricted mobility, economic precarity, and social invisibility—underscore the urgent need to challenge discriminatory policies embedded within the educational system.

"Are you in obeisance or not?" Navigating Egyptian Politics with Nāṣir-i Khusraw.
by Alice Hunsberger / State University of New York at Old Westbury / alice.hunsberger@gmail.com
So intent on praise of Fatimid Egypt is he that, in his Safarnāmah and his poetry, Nāṣir-i Khusraw provides few details of the politics of his three years there (439-442/1047-1050), arriving in the 11th year of 18-year-old Caliph-Imam al-Mustanṣir b'illāh's 60-year reign (r. 427-487/1036-1094), a reign more often noted for its terrible end. While Nāṣir effusively praises the abundance in Cairo's bazaars, Fatimid legal justice, salaried army and judges, and Nile River flood management, he describes only briefly a stand-off with the army, Byzantine diplomacy to gain imperial fabrics, and stern warnings to a Fatimid governor in Syria. He makes no mention that the Caliph's mother, Rasad, a former Nubian slave, is the effective ruler, nor that the court is in the thick of a vizier rivalry, nor that both viziers end up dead and the replacement vizier banished for tyrannical behaviour — all during Nāṣir's short time in Egypt. Nāṣir does relate the severity of drought and famine in Egypt and the Hijaz, in the context of the Fatimid government's need to cancel the Hajj several times because of its inability to feed the pilgrims. He does not mention that Rasad had set up relations with Byzantine Empress Theodora through an exchange of gifts. Through traveler accounts, literature, art, and histories of Fatimid times, this paper aims to clarify the larger political context of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's years in Egypt. By showing rivalries and alliances both state and personal, between Turks and Nubians, concubines and caliphs, Abbasids and Byzantines and Fatimids, it will thereby reveal early stages of discord in Mustanṣir's reign that flower later into the more famous empty treasuries, bare palaces, and the eventual split of Ismaili governance into two groups, each following one of Mustanṣir's sons, Musta'lī. and Nizār.

Reconciling Faith and Intellect: Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Rationalism
by Daryoush Mohammad Poor / Institute of Ismaili Studies / dpoor@iis.ac.uk
The idea of the inseparability of faith and intellect is one of the key features of Ismaili thought from the very early stages of the Ismaili history up to contemporary times. Among the most prominent Ismaili dāʿīs who has contributed significantly to the area of the faith and intellect is Nāṣir-i Khusraw.

In this paper, I will draw primarily on his Jāmiʿ al-ḥikmatayn and his Dīwān to trace the contours of his view on reason and revelation. The coexistence of reason and authority is inherently challenging. For Nāṣir-i Khusraw, human reason needs to be nurtured and nourished. According to him, there are two main sources for this nourishment: one is philosophy (in its broadest sense which covers what we call science today) and the other one is revelation (again broadly covering authority of the Prophet and the Imams). How does Nāṣīr-i Khusraw resolve the challenge? What are the limits of human reason's ability? This paper will also draw on Nāṣri-i Khusraw's confessional ode and the writings of his mentor, al-Muʾayyad fī al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī to demonstrate their belief in maintaining a constant balance – however difficult it may become – between autonomous human mind and the authority of revelation.

In the existing literature available on Nāṣir-i Khusraw's philosophical legacy, there is very little on his conceptualisation of intellect. Probably the most extensive research on it is an essay in Farsi by Shahrukh Meskoob, titled 'Maʾnāy-i ʿaql dar andīshay-i Nāṣir-i Khusraw' (1990) which has remained untranslated to date and continues to be an obscure essay. In this paper, I will try to shed more light on the methodology used by Meskoob and add further to it.

Room 2.19

75. Between Conformity and Resistance: Cultural and Institutional Performances of Power in Post--Revolutionary Iran

Chair: Nima Rahmani

This panel seeks to develop a cultural understanding of power in post-revolutionary Iran—one that traces the mechanisms of domination through the symbolic, experiential, and meaning-making layers of social life. Drawing on cultural sociology, and particularly on the tradition of Cultural Pragmatics in the works of Jeffrey Alexander, power is approached as a network of performances, representations, and narratives of legitimacy—continuously enacted across domains ranging from religious ritual to knowledge production and Musical preferences.

Through three studies, this panel examines how ideology operates within religious ideas, the body, space, and systems of knowledge, shaping human experience and structuring the subtle mechanisms of conformity and dissent within cultural and cognitive fields. These studies explore the boundary between domination and resistance in the very sites where meaning is created and recreated:

• On the religious-cultural level, through the logic of taqiyya as a cultural mechanism of truth management;

• On the epistemic-institutional level, through the reproduction of domination within Iran's system of knowledge production and the human sciences;

•On the aesthetic-social level, through comparing musical circulation in social media in the Woman, Life, Freedom movement and the Twelve-Day Iran–Israel war.

The significance of this approach lies in its understanding of politics as a field of meaning, rather than merely an instrument of coercion. Within this framework, resistance emerges across a wide spectrum—from overt acts of protest to the subtle forms of silence, embodiment, and representation. This panel contributes to a cultural rethinking of Iranian politics, demonstrating how domination is reproduced at the symbolic level, and how this very level—where interpretation and interaction between people and the state take place—constitutes the first arena of possibility for rupture and resistance

Social Resistance Patterns in Kurdistan: A Historical Reappraisal of Social Struggle and Cultural Resistance in Kurdistan after the 1979 Revolution

by Mohammadreza Rahimi / PhD Student at Guilan University
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This article offers a historical reappraisal of social resistance in Kurdistan of Iran, arguing that the 1979 Iranian Revolution constituted a critical juncture that fundamentally altered its modes and expressions. While the immediate post-revolutionary period was characterized by overt political mobilization and armed confrontation with the nascent Republic, contemporary resistance has largely shifted to the cultural sphere, operating through state-sanctioned non-governmental organizations. This study analyzes this transition from armed struggle to cultural praxis as a strategic adaptation to prolonged political suppression. By tracing the continuity of the Kurdish social struggle across these two distinct historical phases, the research demonstrates how resistance patterns are shaped by the dynamic interplay between state power and peripheral national identity. Furthermore, it situates these patterns within the broader context of Kurdish social struggles across the Middle East, highlighting their congruence and mutual influence. The findings underscore the resilience of collective identity and the capacity of social movements to transform their methods of resistance in response to shifting political opportunities and constraints.

Aesthetics of Resistance and Reaction: Protest Music in the Woman, Life, Freedom Movement and the Twelve-Day Iran–Israel War

by Melika Moghaddam / PhD Student at Guilan University / Moghaddam.mlk@gmail.com

This project investigates protest music as a cultural practice that both resists and reinforces power, focusing on two recent turning points in Iranian society: the Woman, Life, Freedom movement (2022) and the Twelve-Day Iran–Israel war (2024). Although occurring within the same society, these events reveal dramatically different collective affects. Music from the Mahsa Amini protests embodied an emancipatory impulse—challenging patriarchal and authoritarian structures and envisioning alternative futures. By contrast, musical responses to the Twelve-Day war often evoked heroic nationalism, nostalgic monarchism, or exclusionary attitudes toward Afghan refugees, signaling a shift toward consolidating existing orders.

Drawing on Herbert Marcuse's theory of aesthetics and emancipation, this study interrogates whether these protest songs align with two cultural logics he critiques:

1. Bourgeois culture, with its inward idealism and consolatory tendencies; or
2. Fascist culture, marked by heroic exaltation and legitimization of domination.

The central question is: Do these musical forms reproduce these logics, or do they generate a third, critical-aesthetic space capable of articulating liberation? In the Iranian case, songs like Shervin Hajipour's Baraye and Mehdi Yarrahi's anthems mobilized affective solidarity and feminist critique, yet at times invoked masculinist imagery. Music surrounding the Twelve-Day war, by contrast, often framed resistance through heroic and nationalist motifs.

Methodologically, the research employs lyrical discourse analysis and digital ethnography to examine how these songs circulate in social media and public spaces, and how audiences interpret them. Ultimately, the project highlights the ambivalent role of protest music in shaping collective visions of resistance and order during crises in the Middle East.

Reflection of Iranian Women's Issues in the Mirror of Scientific Articles from the 2010s : A Critical Review of Sociological Studies in the Field of Women and Its Relation to the University Institution.

by Sepideh Rasekhian / PhD student - Ferdowsi university of Mashhad
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This study dives into how knowledge is actually made in Iran. Here's the core issue: the primary places where academic work—like university research and scholarly papers—is generated and published, such as universities and research institutes, are largely under state control. This means they operate within specific ideological and governmental boundaries.

Knowledge that should be helping to solve women's issues often gets twisted. Instead, it becomes a

tool to legitimize the existing power structures, frequently portraying women only through predictable, stereotypical familial roles.
This isn't just a matter of researchers using the wrong methods; it's deeply shaped by Iran's socio-political climate, which steers research straight toward conservative themes. This observation perfectly aligns with what we talk about in the sociology of knowledge: that power and institutional structures don't just influence knowledge, they actively determine what counts as legitimate truth. The idea of scientific objectivity suggests that science simply mirrors reality. However, within Iran's knowledge production system, science seems to be functioning as a cover, actively concealing deeper structural and gender biases.
For example, throughout the 2010s, academic papers heavily featured topics like gender roles and domestic violence. Meanwhile, critical issues such as abortion, sexual rights, or systemic discrimination were noticeably absent.
State structures—from who gets funding to who gets an academic position—tend to favor research that sticks to the official narrative. If you stray from these established standards, you risk being excluded from both publication and institutional support. This entire process ends up creating a regime of truth that, instead of challenging inequality, systemic oppression, and structural weaknesses, actually reinforces the subordination of women.
This study is a call for a critical look at these knowledge production processes in Iran. It's an invitation to uncover the power relations that are often hidden within seemingly neutral and scientific research.
We can only move toward knowledge that's capable of disrupting dominant discourses—and truly opening new doors for gender equality and justice—by critiquing these mechanisms. Otherwise, we're just stuck perpetuating the status quo.

Performing Hypocrisy: Cultural and Institutional Dimensions of Taqiyya in Iran's Political Modernity
by Nima Rahmani Ghanavizbaf / PhD Student, University of Isfahan, Department of Sociology / nimarahmani13@gmail.com
This paper explores taqiyya—the practice of strategic dissimulation—as a cultural mechanism that blurs the boundary between resistance and submission in post-revolutionary Iran. Rather than treating taqiyya as a mere tactic of survival, the study interprets it as an institutional and cultural logic that has redefined silence sincerity and deception within bureaucratic and moral life. Through a genealogical reading, it traces taqiyya from its emergence in early Shi'ism as a survival strategy of a religious minority to its transformation into a structural position within the cultural order under the coercive imperatives of a Shi'i state after the 1979 Revolution. The paper shows how taqiyya has become embedded in legal, economic, and discursive structures of governance, shaping a form of subjectivity that both enables and conceals domination. The taqiyya-performing subject—marked by public conformity and private dissent—exemplifies a broader cultural condition in which ideological domination reproduces itself through everyday performances of loyalty. In this sense, taqiyya is both the symptom and the medium of Iran's political modernity: a mode of truth management that turns dissimulation into an ethical and institutional norm, while simultaneously obscuring the boundaries of possible resistance.

10:30 – 10:45
Coffee Break

10:45-12:45 **Janskerkhof 2/3**
Room 0.13

76. Revisiting Hedayat 1: His Drawings, and Art in his Fiction

Chair: Nasrin Rahimieh

Arguably the most renowned modern Iranian writer, Sadeq Hedayat and his works, particularly his novel, The Blind Owl, have been widely studied. Nonetheless his works continue to generate debate and discussion about his contributions to modern Persian fiction and his place in world literature. 2026 marks the 90th anniversary of the publication of The Blind Owl and the 75th anniversary of Sadeq Hedayat's suicide in Paris. The three consecutive panels we propose for the Fifteenth Biennial Conference of Iranian Studies commemorate these occasions by showcasing recent and innovative scholarship on Hedayat. Bringing together established and emerging scholars, the panels examine not only Hedayat's literary works but also his drawings.

One panel will focus on visualization in Hedayat's art and fiction. The four panelists will consider Hedayat's work as painter and his visual experimentation, the covers and illustrations that accompany his works, and his use of Persian visual motifs.

A second panel will revisit The Blind Owl, its enigmatic title and the representation of abraded eyes, how surrealism might be configured in the novel, and how the dynamics of forgetting and remembrance magnify the uncanny quality of the narration. It will also analyze a new English translation of his novel and its difficult navigation between fidelity and fluency.

A third panel will focus on specific cultural contexts in (of? affecting?) Hedayat's works. The panelists will examine the question of peripheral modernity shaping his artistic forms, Hedayat's imagined India and his encounters with the Parsi community in India, his shifting nationalism, and his interests in anthropology that intersected with conceptualizations of race.

The Writer as a Painter: Sadeq Hedayat's Drawings During His Sojourn in France (1928–30)by Marta by Marta Simidchieva / York University, Toronto / msimid@yorku.ca

Some of Iran's most prominent modern authors have tried their hand at painting (e.g. Sohrab Sepehri, Forugh Farrokhzad), on occasion becoming as famous for their art as for their literary work. Among them Sadeq Hedayat occupies a place apart, not only for the style of his drawings and sketches, but for integrating art and its practitioners inextricably in his fiction—either as implicit "intertextual" references to famous European and Qajar artworks (e.g. in Afsane-ye afarinesh/The Myth of Creation), or as characters in his most famous prose work (Buf-e kur/The Blind Owl).

The artistic streak ran strong in Sadeq's branch of the Hedayat clan: According to Jahangir Hedayat, Sadeq's father and two brothers painted and drew in the European style with academic proficiency. Unlike them, Sadeq Hedayat was self-taught, given to experimentation, at times producing crude and confrontational satirical pieces, but painting—sketches and drawings in particular— accompanied his creative efforts all his life: According to Homa Katouzian, one particular caricature (deemed irreverent by the Iranian censor) led to the infamous ban on Hedayat's publications in the mid-1930s.

The present study focuses on some of Hedayat's paintings and drawings from his sojourn in France (1928-30), seeking in them visual traces of Hedayat's creative evolvement during this critical juncture of his life as a writer. Many young artists and writers from across the globe flocked to the cosmopolitan metropolis of France in the interwar period, thus creating the syncretic vibe of the various avant garde movements. Taking his Paris drawings as a starting point, this study argues, that the time away from his homeland provided Hedayat with the opportunity to see anew his native culture, and gave him a chance to participate directly in the experiments of the emerging Modernism.

The Lonely Gazelle: Visual Experimentation of Sadegh Hedayat

by Marziyeh Kameli / University of California Riverside / mkame002@ucr.edu

This paper examines The Lonely Gazelle, a little-studied collection of paintings by Sadegh Hedayat, situating them within broader discussions of Iranian modernism and the intersections of literature and visual art. Unlike his father and brothers, who painted in the academic European style, Hedayat was self-taught and deliberately experimental. His visual works, spanning caricature, surrealist, and expressionist modes, should not be read as direct visual counterparts to his fiction.
Most of the paintings in The Lonely Gazelle are undated, making it impossible to connect them with certainty to specific literary texts. Attempts to impose such linkages risk reducing the images to mere illustrations. Instead, this study approaches the paintings as autonomous experiments that embody the fragmentary spirit of modernist exploration. While recurrent motifs—distorted human figures, anthropomorphic animals, exaggerated eyes—appear throughout, they resist forming a programmatic body of work. These motifs testify to Hedayat's fascination with distortion, hybridity, and play, qualities that resonate with global currents of modernism while reflecting his distinctive sensibility.
One dated painting, produced after the publication of The Blind Owl, illustrates this point. Featuring a gun and a wine glass, it seems at first to extend the novel's atmosphere of despair and intoxication. Yet its sketch-like execution and almost playful arrangement of objects resist such a literal correspondence. Rather than functioning as an illustration of The Blind Owl, the work underscores Hedayat's experimental approach: he reduces objects of heavy symbolic weight into simplified shapes, testing how violence and pleasure might coexist visually without the density of literary narrative. In this sense, the painting affirms that his art was not about extending his fiction onto canvas but about exploring autonomous avenues of modernist experimentation.
By reading this collection as visual experiments rather than a unified body, this paper broadens our understanding of Hedayat as a multidimensional modernist.

Persian Visual Motifs Translated in The Blind Owl
by Shafigheh Keivan / INALCO CERMOM / s_keivan@yahoo.com
This paper studies the textual translation of classical Persian visual motifs in Sadegh Hedayat's The Blind Owl and in the light of the unity of theme, poetics and narrative structure of the novel. A keen observer and appreciator of Persian artistic and architectural patterns, as reflected in his travelogue Esfahan, Half of the World as well as in the recurrent motifs decorating some of his own sketches, Hedayat is a writer whose artistically nourished imagination permeates his literary works. In The Blind Owl, this Persian visual heritage is evoked through the 'mise en abyme' effect created by the narrator of the novel: a miniaturist. In the present study, I explore how recurrent ornamental motifs in Persian art and architecture, such as arabesques, vegetal and calligraphic designs, geometric networks, etc., are reappropriated by Hedayat to aesthetically narrativize the modern Iranian subject's interior conflicts. By foregrounding this process, I argue that the novel not only represents the dispersed, fragmentary self of the subject but also stages his struggle for order and cohesion through its artistic discourse.

Room 0.17

77. Concepts and Narratives in the Historiography of Iranian Art and Architecture
Chair: Reza Masoudi Nejad, Haleh Hajyasini
This panel brings together four studies that examine the historiography of "Iranian art and architecture" and the ways in which this field was actively constructed throughout the twentieth century. It explores how diverse artistic and architectural traditions were translated into unified narratives through specific modes of historical writing, conceptualization, and visual representation. Although centered on different figures, texts, and historiographical projects, each paper analyzes how early scholars, historians, or state institutions, with varied intentions, mobilized concepts to determine what could be seen, valued, and classified as "Iranian." Notions such as "continuity,"

“spirit,” “revival,” and “national memory” are central to these inquiries. Yet these notions emerge and operate within different intellectual contexts, revealing the variety of frameworks through which Iran’s architectural past was constructed and narrated.
The first paper analyzes a broad corpus of comprehensive historical writings, from Arthur Upham Pope to Mohammad Karim Pirnia, to trace how “Iranian architecture” became naturalized as a scholarly category. It examines how ideas such as “authenticity,” “tradition,” and “the spirit of Iranian architecture” were used to impose coherence on diverse architectural practices and to delineate the boundaries of the field.
The second paper turns to a single text, Karim Taherzadeh Behzad’s Saramadān-e Honar (1923), to uncover how the book, though fragmented in discussions, is structured around the conceptual frameworks of “Renaissance” and “revival.” It shows how this early Persian-language historiography imagines renewal through a re-engagement with a reconstructed pre-Islamic past.
The third paper examines how the White Revolution (1963) was conceptually framed within architectural and urban discourse. It explores how architecture and its history were used to visualize state-led narratives of progress, modernity, and national renewal, and how concepts such as “national memory” shaped a historiographical understanding of the revolution within built form.
The fourth paper examines the writings of André Godard, focusing on how he employed concepts like “continuity,” “unity,” and the “spirit” of Iranian art to translate material form into a sign of enduring civilization. In his work, architecture becomes a language through which the past is organized into a coherent narrative of national lineage.
Together, the papers illuminate how Iranian art and architectural history became an object of scholarly and ideological knowledge, defined, systematized, and conceptually framed in ways that continue to shape its study.

Rereading Sarāmadān-e Honar; Uncovering the Hidden Logic of the First Modern Historiography of Iranian Art and Architecture

by Shima Boka / PhD Candidate in Architecture / boka.shima@gmail.com

Karim Tāherzadeh Behzād’s Sarāmadān-e Honar (The Prominent Figures in Art), written in Persian and published in Berlin in 1923, should be recognized as the first modern historiography of art and architecture of Iran. However, it has rarely been acknowledged as such. The book’s structure includes a preface on Iran’s decorative arts throughout history, chapters on the lives and works of Kamāl al-Din Behzād and Raphael, miniature painting in Iran and Europe, architecture and fine crafts, the life and legacy of Mani the Prophet, and a diverse appendix of images and maps. Its marginalization stems, in part, from the dispersion and thematic variety of its contents, which give it the appearance of an eclectic anthology. Additionally, the author’s lack of a clear historiographical framework has made it difficult to discern the internal coherence of the book.
This study reconstructs the book’s underlying logic by examining Taherzadeh’s historiographical vision and intellectual perspective. It argues that key concepts such as “Renaissance” and “Revival” function as connective threads, generating a hidden unity across the seemingly fragmented sections. To support this reading, the research draws not only on the book itself but also on Taherzadeh’s other writings and biographical sources.
Through an Orientalist lens, Taherzadeh proposes a comparative historiography of Iranian and Western art, theorizing the possibility of reviving Iranian art and architecture—particularly through reference to the pre-Islamic era. Rereading this work as a coherent intellectual statement not only reclaims its place in the historiography of Iranian art and architecture but also offers new insight into the discourses of art and architecture during Iran’s transition to modernity.

Key Notions of “Iranian Architecture” in Twentieth-Century Scholarship

by Haleh Hajyasini / Independent Researcher / haleh.h.yasini@gmail.com
This paper examines the conceptual foundations through which “Iranian architecture” emerged as a distinct and seemingly self-evident historical category in twentieth-century scholarship. It argues that the field’s formative historiography was not merely a compilation of architectural facts but a mode of knowledge production that actively produced the idea of “Iranian architecture” as a coherent and homogenizing construct that imposes unity and overshadows diversity. By tracing the conceptual vocabularies that shaped this process, such as “continuity,” “authenticity,” “appropriation,” “the spirit of Iranian architecture,” and “tradition,” the study reveals how these notions established both the unity and the exclusions that continue to define the field.
Drawing on close readings of major narratives, from Arthur Upham Pope’s A Survey of Persian Art, André Godard’s The Art of Iran, to Mohammad Karim Pirnia’s Stylistics of Iranian Architecture, the paper shows how historiographical frameworks transformed diverse architectural practices across time and geography into a singular lineage. Early Western accounts articulated “Iranian architecture” through comparative civilizational models, positioning it between imitation and originality. Later Iranian scholars, while rejecting the West as a reference point, adopted similar conceptual structures to assert a continuous and internally unified national discourse.
Through these frameworks, “Iranian architecture” acquired a disciplinary mold, one that privileged monumental, premodern forms, aligned historical periodization with dynastic successions, and rendered later architectural practices marginal or anomalous. This historiographical configuration not only stabilized a canon but also prescribed the criteria by which architecture could be recognized as properly “Iranian.” By tracing the genealogy of these concepts, the paper reveals how the field’s intellectual scaffolding continues to shape both its objects of study and its silences. It argues that the very coherence of “Iranian architecture” rests on conceptual constructs whose enduring authority must be critically reassessed to rethink the epistemological boundaries and possibilities of writing architectural history in and of Iran.

Conceptualizing the White Revolution in Iranian Architectural Historiography
by Marziyeh Bazyar / PhD candidate / bazyar@architekturmuseum.de
This paper examines how the White Revolution (1963), a state-led reform program under the late Pahlavi state, was conceptually framed and visually articulated within architectural and urban discourse. Through an analysis of key cultural events from the 1960s and 70s, ranging from commemorative monuments to museum exhibitions, it explores how architecture and urban space were mobilized to narrate the revolution’s ideals of progress, modernity, and national renewal. Rather than focusing solely on the physical structures, the paper investigates how con-cepts such as national memory were employed to construct a historiographical narra-tive that aligned architecture with the ideological goals of the state. It argues that these built environments functioned not only as ideological tools but also as vehicles for shaping a coherent vision of Iranian identity and historical continuity. By situating these architectural representations within broader historiographical frameworks, the paper contributes to understanding how revolutionary ideals were translated into spatial and conceptual forms that continue to influence the study of Iranian architectural history.

Room 0.19

78. Roundtable Festschrift in honour of Houchang Chehabi

Chair: Roham Alvandi
Participants: Afshin Marashi, David Motadel, Olga Davidson, Babak Fozoon, Afshin Matin-Asgari, Nahid Siamdoust, Robert Steele, Lior Sternfeld, Farzin Vejdani

Room 0.21

79. Social Histories of Technology and the Environment

Chair: James M. Gustafson

This panel will explore relationships between social history, technology, and the environment since the late 19th century. The disciplines of Science and Technology Studies (STS) and Environmental History offer theoretical lenses that see beyond the supposed objectivity of science and subjectivity of culture. The papers on this panel will present case studies on how science and technology emerge from, and participate in, social processes. We will explore the early industrialization of carpet manufacturing and its environmental impacts, British proposals (and Iranian counterproposals) for environmental engineering projects in the early 20thcentury, plastics production in post-WWII development programs, and social histories of the bicycle. As a collection, these case studies will show the diverse approaches available to researchers once we break down the false dichotomies of nature and society, or the scientific and the cultural. We will include discussions of natural resources, the normative goals of development programs and scientific interventions, and gender studies among others, with the goal of encouraging further research and theoretical discussions about social histories of technology and the environment.

Environmental Engineering as Anti-Colonial Resistance: Mirza Riza Muhandis' 1904 Report on the Newcomen Mission

by James M. Gustafson / Indiana State University / james.gustafson@indstate.edu

This paper analyzes a series of environmental engineering interventions suggested in a 1904 commercial report by Mirza Riza Muhandis. Mirza Riza served as a military liaison to a British Commercial Mission to Iran headed by a tea planter and industrialist named Arthur Gleadowe-Newcomen, who was charged with finding opportunities to expand trade relationships between Iran and India. As the Newcomen mission traveled throughout southern Iran, they identified environmental obstacles as one of the main issues preventing a natural expansion of trade. Mirza Riza Muhandis, unbeknownst to the group, was preparing a secret counter-narrative outlining his misgivings about the roadways, surface dams, and technical interventions they were suggesting and provided his own counterproposals to court. These environmental engineering interventions were framed as anti-colonial resistance, serving the interests of Iranian producers and the tributary state they supported against what Mirza Riza suggested were predatory designs by Newcomen and his team. This case study highlights tensions over development and inequality at a critical moment in Iran's history, just months before the beginnings of the 1906 Constitutional Revolution.

The German Factory Persische Teppich-Gesellschaft (PETAG): A laboratory for Technological Intervention in Early Twentieth Century Iran

by Fatemeh Masjedi / Göttingen University / fmasjed@gmail.com

In this panel, I will explore how PETAG factories of Persische Teppich Gesellschaft (PETAG) established across Iran in the early twentieth centuries directors' strategy benefited from using local vegetables and herbs for dying techniques and later on including synthetic dying techniques as western innovation? How did the politics of dying become part of the social history of Tabriz and Azerbaijan? The German company, in competition with Russian, British and Italian carpet manufacturers, sought to reduce manufacturing costs by importing synthetic colours, such as Indigo dye, to Persia from 1906 onwards. The PETAG records collected in the German archives (Bundesarchiv and Landesarchiv) in Berlin, which contain resources on the carpet-making industry in Tabriz.

Synthetic Society: PVC Production and the Promotion of Plastics in Iran

by Ciruce Movahedi-Lankarani / University of Southern California / cmovahed@usc.edu

Iranians are today among the world's largest producers and consumers of plastic materials. As a consequence, the country faces an intensifying problem with environmentally persistent plastic

pollution. In the 1950s and 1960s, however, Iranian plastics consumption centered on a small number of expensive and niche items, a far cry from the ubiquity of cheap plastic products that would eventually come to flood Iranian society and its environment. Focusing on a 1950s-era proposal to build a plant for the production of PVC, this paper explores the rise of plastics as a class of widely consumed materials in Iran. Plastics production was rooted in developmentalist ambitions to build a broader petrochemical industry, one that would be supplied from the country's enormous oil and gas reserves and promised to bring in lucrative new export revenues. But PVC served only as an intermediate product, and the project depended upon the fostering of both widespread consumer demand and a large number of manufacturers willing to make usable finished goods. With near infinite malleability, PVC lent itself to a wide array of potential uses, and considerable effort was put to finding and showcasing those deemed most promising. Part of a broader drive to industrialize Iran's economy and society, that process serves as a lens for understanding how lifeways predicated upon resource-intensive lifeways began to take shape there, ultimately shedding light on how the country's growing environmental troubles have come about.

"The Amsterdam of Iran": The Provincial and National Politics of Cycling in Isfahan

by Mikiya Koyagi / University of Texas at Austin / mikiya.koyagi@austin.utexas.edu

Despite the general absence of the bicycle as an everyday mode of transport in today's Iran, it was widely used by the working class, both in major cities and provincial towns, during the golden age of bicycles in the mid twentieth-century. This was especially so in Isfahan, whose inhabitants proudly called their city "the city of bicycles (shahr-e docharkheh'ha)." Through the case of Isfahan, this paper examines how cycling became entangled in provincial and national politics. By using Persian governmental documents, travelogues, memoirs, press sources, and photographs, the paper contributes to existing scholarship in two ways. First, by studying Iran's case, it rectifies the history of cycling's overwhelming emphasis on the global North, which experienced the bicycle boom at the turn of the twentieth century. An exploration into a history of cycling in the global South draws attention to the often-overlooked moment of the mid-twentieth century, when the bicycle became entangled with the imagination of economic development and mass consumer culture. Second, by studying Isfahan, this paper illustrates the localized nature of technological appropriation within a national context; it shows that the bicycle has acquired multiple symbolic meanings in Iranian provincial and national politics, from the symbol of Isfahan's distinct modernity (centered around working-class mobility and environmental friendliness) to the anxieties over the transgression of social boundaries by cyclists, especially female cyclists, since the 1990s onward.

Room 0.22

80. The Afterlife of Sadi Shirazi's Legacy in the Persianate World: Print Culture in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries

Chair: Roxana Zenhari

The literary prestige of Saʿdī's works inspired the creation of lavishly illustrated and illuminated manuscripts—particularly within royal libraries where the conventions of adab were meticulously cultivated—and secured their place within the pedagogical canon, disseminating Saʿdī's didactic wisdom to broader audiences in the Persianate world. In nineteenth century with the advent of lithographic printing, the rise of colonial powers, and the onset of modernity through new technologies, both the readership of Saʿdī's works and their role within Persian intellectual culture underwent significant transformation.

This panel examines the reproduction and reception of Saʿdī's works as a symbolic manifestation of Persian identity, exploring how his writings were reimagined, disseminated, and read through the medium of print and amid broad social and political transformations across both colonial and non-colonial contexts. Furthermore, it seeks to elucidate the dynamic interplay between the medieval

wisdom embedded in Saʿdī's thought and the intellectual and cultural transformations brought about by modernity.
The panel approaches its subject through three interrelated domains: form, interpretation, and reception. The first paper traces continuities and departures from manuscript traditions in the lithographed editions of Saʿdī's works, contextualizing transformations in modes of production through a formal analysis of Tehran, Lucknow, and Tashkent. The second paper delves into the culture of annotation surrounding the Golestān, exploring shifts in interpretive practices and intellectual interests among commentators in north India from the eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries. The third paper examines the reception of Saʿdī's erotic anecdotes and argues that Saʿdī's erotic ethos exerted a more enduring influence on colonial Indian audiences than the imported Victorian codes of propriety and the fourth one presents two rare, printed editions of Saʿdī's works produced in Afghanistan in the early twentieth century and contends with their significance within the broader cultural and intellectual context of the country.

Commentaries on the Gulistan: Print Culture and Interpretation in Colonial India
by Zahra Shah / University of Bristol / zahra.shah@bristol.ac.uk
The Gulistan of Sa'di Shirazi is often cited as an exemplar of the temporal stability and spatial inclusivity of the Persianate world: a symbol of the shared socio-literary heritage and adab of Persianized groups. However, the ubiquitous presence of the Gulistan across time and space can be misleading, and a close attention to the ways in which it was interpreted in different contexts reveals shifting social norms that challenge notions of the text's temporal stability. The very interpretative flexibility that enabled the Gulistan to survive over the centuries and adapt to different contexts and readerships also lends itself to reading the commentaries on the Gulistan as indexes of socio-cultural change and fragmentation in periods of rupture and transformation. Far more than vehicles through which the "reception" of the Gulistan may be traced, commentaries were active, creative acts of reading and the negotiation of meaning. Accordingly, this paper will examine commentaries and margin notes produced for printed editions of the Gulistan in north India in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in order to show how the interests and interpretations of commentators and their audiences shifted during this period. Focusing in particular on the themes set out in the Gulistan's eight babs, this paper will ask how ideas about political power and kingship, love and gender, ageing and intellect changed or remained stable from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries in India, and interrogate the extent to which these shifts may be explained by the technology of printing. It will do so by comparing commentaries published by north Indian presses with earlier manuscript commentaries, and by situating the publications within their immediate contexts of authorship and production to highlight local differences and fissures in the world of Persian letters.

Reproducing Saʿdi Shirazi in Lithographed Artifacts of the Persianate World: Tehran, Tashkent and Lucknow
by Roxana Zenhari / Georg August University / r.roxanazenhari@gmail.com
The advent of lithography in the Islamic world enabled the preservation of manuscript culture and its visual conventions within the emerging medium of lithography. In Persianate culture, particularly in Iran, and among the lithographed reproductions of iconic Persian literature, the work of poet Sheykh Moṣleḥ al-Din Saʿdi Shirazi (d. 1291) reveals a specific range of evolution in terms of content, layout, format, and picture cycles. While the first lithographed versions of his works imitated royal productions, the later printed works of the book (in the format of the entire Kolliyāt, single books of Golestān, anthologies, etc.) reveal innovations that depart from old conventions. The proposed paper will first explore how the format and contents were shaped in the first lithographed printed

books of Saʿdi produced in Tehran and Tabriz between 1851 and 1900. To this end, through a comparative analysis of early lithographed editions of the Kolliyāt and their manuscript counterparts, I examine the continuity of the manuscript tradition while also addressing the deviations from earlier conventions that rendered these printed works more appealing to an expanded readership beyond a traditionally privileged few. In the following section, I trace the production of lithographed versions of Saʿdi's works in broader cultural contexts—specifically in Lucknow and Tashkent—where marginal annotations (sharḥ dar ḥāshieh) and the practice of appending extensive motivational notes, defined by the producers as taʿrīż, alongside illustrative images, emerged as strategies to engage wider audiences. Through a formal analysis, this paper examines the transformations in the reproduction of Saʿdi's works as multilayered cultural artifacts, in order to elucidate their role in shaping cultural and intellectual identities across diverse contexts on the threshold of modernity.

The Ethics of Erotics: Reading the Gulistan in Colonial India

by Hasan Hameed / Princeton University / hasanhameed20@gmail.com

Historians of colonial India have held that nineteenth-century Indian intellectuals absorbed Victorian sexual ethics. Bashfulness in talking about sex and silence on same-sex matters are said to have become the norm for the colonized. These cultural changes allegedly dovetailed with a linguistic change: a turn away from Persian towards English and Indian 'vernaculars.' This paper questions these historiographical tenets by drawing on the Indian reception of a classical Persian text of Islamic ethics, the Gulistan of Saʿdi (d. 1291). The Gulistan was among the most printed texts in nineteenth-century India, with its editions frequently containing marginal commentaries, interlinear translations, variant readings, and visual illustrations. Attention to these prints reveals that a significant number of Indian scholars and lay readers engaged openly with the sexual and homoerotic themes of the Gulistan. As in the precolonial era, Indians approached the text under a paradigm that I call the ethics of erotics: experiencing and discoursing upon desire was part of this paradigm, but acting upon same-sex desire was prohibited. In the negotiated space between desire, language, and action, lay the possibility of ethical cultivation. I pay close attention to the textual and material features of Gulistan lithographs, addressing concerns of both intellectual and book histories. I thereby reveal a cross-communal engagement with Persian literature, continuities between early modern and colonial-era Indian engagements with sexual themes, and the enduring role of Islamic ethical literature in propagating sexual knowledge in colonial India.

Room 1.09

81. Landscapes of Transition: Routes, Landscapes, and Cultural Interaction in the Zagros in the First Millennium CE

Chair: Touraj Daryaee

This panel presents the results of a collaborative project promoted by Sapienza – University of Rome and the University of California, Irvine, which investigates the historical, spatial, linguistic, and socio-cultural development of human societies in the Zagros region from the Arsacid through the early Islamic periods. Bringing together specialists in archaeology, philology, history, and digital humanities, the panel seeks to reconstruct the evolution of settlement systems, cultural practices, and administrative structures during a millennium of profound political and cultural transformation. Participants follow a dual line of inquiry. On one side, the project critically re-examines archaeological documentation and epigraphic corpora—such as Sasanian glyptics, numismatics, and Middle Persian epigraphic sources—while situating them within a wider framework of historical and documentary traditions. On the other hand, archaeological fieldwork in Iraqi Kurdistan, particularly in the upper Diyala basin and the Sharazur plain, provides new evidence of how communities experienced and negotiated successive shifts from Arsacid to Sasanian and, later, Islamic rule. These complementary strands allow for a more nuanced reconstruction of the interplay between local

agency and imperial structures.
Methodologically, the panel emphasizes innovation in combining material and textual data. Archaeological and spatial datasets are integrated with philological evidence within a digital humanities framework. GIS-based mapping of inscriptions, modeled on earlier epigraphic initiatives, enables the production of thematic maps that trace diachronic changes in landscape use, administrative networks, and cultural interaction. This approach sheds light on how environmental and political shifts were culturally mediated, received, and internalized by the societies of the Zagros. By addressing the economic, religious, linguistic, and identity-related dimensions of these processes, the panel underscores the central role of human agency in shaping both landscapes and institutions. Ultimately, it demonstrates how interdisciplinary collaboration can illuminate the complex cultural interactions that culminated in the Islamic conquest of the Iranian plateau and reshaped the historical trajectory of the region.

Across the Border of Āsōrestān: Imperial Itineraries and Territorial Strategies in Sasanian Garmēgān and Syārazūr

by Carlo Giovanni Cereti / University of California, Irvine / ccereti@uci.edu
Carlo G. Cereti with Gianfilippo Terribili

During the Sasanian period, the region between the middle course of the Diyala River and the Shahrazur plain—corresponding roughly to the historical provinces of Garmēgān and Syārazūr, on the western fringes of the Zagros—served as a key crossroads linking Āsōrestān with Media, Ādurbādagān, and the Sub-Caucasian regions to the north.
This paper investigates the strategic importance and transformation of this area through two key case studies, focusing on the reigns of Narseh (293–302 C) and Kawād I (488–496, 498–531 CE). By examining these two pivotal moments, an integrated analysis of textual and archaeological evidence offers a reassessment of how the Sasanians perceived this territory as a vital gateway, while also providing deeper insight into the empire's evolving policies of territorial management. In particular, by examining Narseh's rise to power and the symbolic implications of "crossing into Āsōrestān," the paper explores how the act of entering Mesopotamia was charged with ideological significance in the Sasanian political imagination. It argues that the crossing of borders—geographical, political, and conceptual—functioned as a ritual of legitimacy and authority, situating Narseh's challenge within broader patterns of imperial self-fashioning and dynastic competition.
Kawād's case, by contrast, sheds light on the far-reaching reforms and structural transformations undertaken in the final century and a half of Sasanian rule. Despite gaps in the archaeological record, multiple sources—now reinforced by recent glyptic evidence—point to the king's active involvement in this macro-region. His initiatives appear aimed at enhancing agricultural productivity, improving infrastructure, and strengthening regional connectivity. Taken together, the evidence suggests that late Sasanian rulers pursued a strategy of consolidating imperial control by reinforcing the hinterland around the increasingly prominent metropolitan hub of Ctesiphon.

From Syarazur to Garmegan: archeological landscapes of Sasanian period in the upper Diyala region

by Giulio Maresca / Sapienza University of Rome / giulio.maresca@uniroma1.it

The Sasanian provinces of Garmegan (the Garamea of classical sources) and Syarazur (Ar. Sharazor), located in the Upper Diyala region (modern Southern Iraqi Kurdistan), were critical zones of transcultural, economic, and political transition in Late Antiquity. Functioning as a strategic interface between the Mesopotamian lowlands and the Iranian plateau, this region remains comparatively under-investigated despite its role as a cultural and linguistic crossroads.
This paper aims to systematize new interdisciplinary knowledge to reconstruct the historical-

territorial framework of this area, establishing better-defined chronological and geographical contours. It employs a multi-scalar landscape archaeology approach, integrating data from recent intensive archaeological surveys and remote sensing with a critical analysis of primary written sources.
The research focuses on two contiguous regions: Garmegan, stretching from present-day Kirkuk to Sarpol-e Zohab (historic Chalonitis), and the Syarazur intermontane plain (in the modern Sulaymaniyah Governorate), enclosed by the Qaradagh and Hawraman mountains. Particular attention is paid to the major communication routes that intersected the area—including mountain passes known since the Neo-Assyrian era accessing Media—and the urban centers, administrative subdivisions, and monumental sites of royal commission established along them.
During the Sasanian period (3rd–7th c. CE), this territory was a vital node in the imperial road system, linking Mesopotamia, Iran, and the Sub-Caucasus with the Roman limes. The investigation reveals a densely occupied and highly structured landscape, profoundly reshaped by state-level investment in hydraulic infrastructures and settlement planning. This paper argues that the Syarazur and Garmegan regions were not a neglected periphery but a defined, controlled, and deeply integrated component of the Sasanian Eranshahr, challenging previous models of Sasanian frontier organization.

Yasin Tepe and Neighboring Sites in the 1st Millenium CE: A Historical and Archaeological Archetype for Agrarian Landscapes under Iranian Empires?
by Mark K. Gradoni / University of California, Irvine / mgradoni@uci.edu
The Shahrezur plain in the Sulaymaniyah Governorate of the Kurdish Regional Government of Iraq is one of the most intensively archaeologically scrutinized landscapes in Iraqi Kurdistan. Bounded by the Zagros range to the northeast, the Binzird Dagh, Baranan Dagh, and Qara Dagh and to the south, and the Lesser Zab to the northwest, the Shahrezur plain is well-watered by both the perennial spring at Bestansur and the Tanjero River as it flows southeast into the Sirwan/Diyala River. The intensity of archaeological investigation reflects density of settlement in the longue durée, including more than one dozen sites with traces of occupation dating to the Arsacid and Sasanian periods up to the Islamic conquest. This paper brings together the results of the last two decades of historical and archaeological investigations of the landscapes and settlements of the middle Shahrezur to explore this region as an example of settlement organization within an agriculturally productive zone at the heart of the Iranian empires in the first millennium.
Separated from Sasanian province of Āsōristān by the region of Garamigān, the plain was a world apart from the sprawling network of cities that made up the imperial capital at Ctesiphon. Instead, the Shahrezur was dotted with settlements that would have housed the labor force necessary to till the fields and tend the rice paddies. The agricultural exploitation of the landscape produced a wealthy local nobility attested in the third century inscription of the Sasanian king of kings Narseh I (r. 293-302) at Paikuli. Building upon the foundational work of the Shahrizor Survey Project and subsequent archaeological investigations in the area, this paper postulates that the multi-phase site of Yasin Tepe and its environs offer a model for understanding the interplay of agrarian landscape and settlement organization in this region of the ancient Iranian world.

Straddling Qaradagh and the Lower Zagros: Routes Connecting Sharazur to Garmian
by Melissa DePierro / UC Irvine / mdepierr@uci.edu
Winding through the passes of the lower Zagros, the route between the Shahrazur plain and Garmian once shaped the rhythms of empire, herding, and pilgrimage, yet its precise course has long eluded reconstruction. This paper seeks to retrace these corridors by intersecting ethnographic data, historical sources, and GIS analysis. At its center lies the puzzle of the Paikuli monument's setting: a

Sasanian royal inscription standing at the foot of a demanding pass, where nobles once swore allegiance to Narseh (293–302/3 CE). The monument's placement raises a question—why here? Why not the more navigable Diyala valley or the Sagirma and Bazian routes favored by travelers well into the late Ottoman era?

Western travelogues and Ottoman maps suggest that, until the mid-twentieth century, the Paikuli axis primarily served seasonal transhumance, as Kurdish tribes moved between Garmian's winter quarters and Zagros summer pastures near Penjwen or across the Persian frontier. Reconstructing this nomadic landscape is both urgent and challenging: the decline of pastoral mobility after World War II, the devastations of the Anfal campaign, and modern interventions such as the Darbandikhan and Dewana dams have obscured or erased entire segments of these routes.

To address these absences, this study integrates ethnographic fieldwork across the Shahrazur–Garmian interface with nineteenth-century travel accounts (Rich, Ker Porter, Heude, Mignan) and GIS mapping of toponyms, water points, cemeteries, and remembered halts to model route choice under seasonal and hydrological constraints. The results reveal a braided network of movement rather than a single "road," recovering forgotten pastoral corridors and yielding a diachronic model that refines earlier identifications while guiding future archaeological and heritage initiatives.

Room 1.10

82. The Many Worlds of Tārīkh-i Qum: Local Governance, Urban Growth, and Shiʿi Identity in Tārīkh-i Qum

Chair: Zahra Azhar

This panel explores Tārīkh-i Qum (comp.378/988- Transl. 9th/15th), a Persian translation of a lost Arabic chronicle. The significance of the book lies both in the subjects it addresses and in the sources the author employed. Unlike many other local histories of that period, which focused primarily on the ruling elite, this work covers a wide range of topics (Lambton, 1991, pp. 230–31; Meisami, pp. 9–10). According to the author himself (pp. 12–13), his initial plan was to compose two separate books: one devoted to the city of Qum and another to the Ashʿarīs of Qum. These themes are also the main themes of the panel.

The first paper highlights details preserved in the book about negotiations between local rulers and Arab settlers, financial management, and taxation. Set alongside the Middle Persian "Pahlavi Archive of Hastijan," the text provides rare insights into the end of Sasanian rule and the incorporation of central Iran into the Islamic polity.

The second paper paper addresses the impacts of the Arab settlement in the Qum region. Based on the analysis of the Tarikh-i Qum (and some Middle Persian documents from the Qum region), this paper will show that the Arabs specifically invested in the restoration and further development of the pre-Islamic kariz (underground water) system and urban infrastructure that marked a new phase of urban development in Qum.

The third paper turns to the emergence of Shiʿism, situating the Ashʿarī clan and the burials of the Prophet's descendants within the genealogical and spatial fabric of Qom. It argues that the text provides an unparalleled lens on how Imami Shiʿism became embedded in the city's social and physical environment.

The last paper focuses on inheritance and marriage patterns among the descendants of Mūsā al-Kāẓim. It asks whether the abstention from marriage among certain women reflects early sectarian strategies, social pressures, or other factors, thereby highlighting the work's contribution to the history of Shiʿi women.

Unmarried Daughters? Marriage, Inheritance, and the 'Alid Family in Ta'rīkh-i Qum

by Zahra Azhar / Leiden University / z.azhar@hum.leidenuniv.nl

The Imam Musa al-Kazim, in his will, references of which are preserved in al-Ya'qubi, Shaykh Saduq, Kulayni, and the Tarikh-I Qumm, prohibited the marriage of any of his daughters. The latter of which preserves a local, Iranian history of Musa's via his great-grandson the Imam al-Jawād and his progeny. I will explore the marriage and procreation patterns of the descendants of al-Jawad in the Ta'rīkh-i Qum to determine whether or not the prescriptions of al-Kazim's will extended beyond his lifetime and shaped the Imami family. To do this, I will use the inheritance records transmitted in Ta'rīkh-i Qum to understand the marriage patterns of the daughters of the descendants of al-Jawād, and more broadly, whether these accounts can help us understand the reasons behind the apparent cessation of marriage among certain female members of the 'Alid family. Was this abstention from marriage a continuation of Mūsā b. Ja'far's will, in which his daughters were enjoined to remain unmarried? Or might it reflect a later political strategy adopted by the 'Alid family after Mūsā's time? Could other explanations—social, economic, or sectarian—better account for this phenomenon? Furthermore, this study examines whether Ta'rīkh-i Qumm provides additional information about the lifestyle and social position of 'Alid women in Qumm, thereby contributing to a broader understanding of the role of women in early Shī'ī history.

History and Historiography of the Age of Transition in Central Iran: Evidence from Tarikh-e Qom Reconsidered

by Khodadad Rezakhani / PhD 2010: Late Antique Near Eastern History, University of California, Los AngelesMSc 2002: Global History, London School of Economics / khodadad.rezakhani@oeaw.ac.at

Studies of the Islamic conquests in Iran and the former Sasanian lands are most often focused on the course of the conquests in Iraq, Khuzistan, and southern Iran in its initial stages (before 660's) and thereafter, on the conquests of Khurasan and Transoxiana further east, under the later Umayyads. Many modern studies ignore, or pass over, the conquests in Central Iran, particularly the region north of Isfahan up to Rayy and the Alburz range, mainly due to a lack of primary sources.

We are, however, blessed by the presence of Tarikh-e Qom, a unique source available to us in a later Persian translation and recension. This important work, available in several manuscripts but only partially edited and made available, provides much important detail about the region that later came to be known as Jibal. Focusing on the city of Qom and its environs, the Tarikh is framed as an attempt to supplement and correct the account provided by Hamza al-Isfahani on the local history of the region. Consequently, it is not only a simple account of local history - akin to Tarikh-e Bukhara and Tarikh-e Sistan - but also provides great insight to the process of formation of local historiography in early Islamic Iran.

The present paper delves deeply into the text of Tarikh-e Qom, focusing on the information it provides for the local transition to the Islamic system and the reflection of local dynamics in the way the transition is explained. By using the newly available Pahllavi sources from the region (the so-called Qom or Hastijan Archive), as well as comparison with the accounts of Hamza and al-Tabari, the paper will not only follow the process of local political and economic transition, but also comments on the way this transition was remembered by the later author and editors of Tarikh-e Qom. The result will be an exercise not only in understanding local history better, but to argue for the importance of Urban historiography in early Islamic Iran.

[title unknown]

Ed Hayes

Room 1.11

83. Media, Modernity, and Public Life in Iran, in the Late nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries

Chair: Hanieh Bakhtiari

This panel examines the entangled histories of media, gender, and public life in Iran from the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries by tracing how shifting technologies and cultural products such as print, visual culture, cinema, and wireless broadcasting reshaped the public sphere and reconfigured the possibilities for modern communications and social participation. Moving beyond a linear narrative of modernization, these papers investigate how the first-time advent of media practices facilitated negotiation between a modernizing nation and its new encounter with emerging modes of audio-visual technology, altering how people discussed sexual relationships, communications, intimacy and state authority.

The first paper analyzes the women-run press of the early twentieth century, exploring how female writers addressed taboo topics such as marital sexuality and prostitution while navigating the constraints of modesty and nationalist discourse. The second paper investigates the intermedial relationship between periodical print and early wireless broadcasting in the 1920s–30s, showing how new communication technologies transformed the modalities of political deliberation, including for religious authorities, and redefined the scope of public engagement. The third paper turns to cinema halls from the 1920s to 1960s as "laboratories of intimacy," where audience practices challenged moral prescriptions, reimagined social norms, and tried new forms of relationality within a new public space. The fourth paper examines women's visual representation in newspapers from the late Qajar to the early Pahlavi era, by revealing how newspaper images mediated women's participation in public rituals, nationalist projects, and reformist campaigns while also subjecting them to new forms of visual regulation.

Together, these studies illuminate the media infrastructures, both in their materiality and their symbolic significance, that shaped modern Iranian everyday public life. By foregrounding intermedial connections and embodied practices, the panel rethinks the public sphere as a dynamic and contested arena where modernity was actively created by its social actors.

Women, Sexuality, and the Public Sphere: Negotiating Modernity in the Iranian Women's Press (1925–1941)

by Hanieh Bakhtiari / University of Toronto / hanieh.bakhtiari@mail.utoronto.ca

Women-run press in Iran emerged as early as 1911 in Tehran. This marked an unprecedented step for women entering the public sphere, as they joined the growing community of readers and writers. While many of these periodicals were feminist in spirit and advocated for women's rights and education, their content supported the broader national modernization project. The textual contents published in periodicals often promoted state-mandated femininity, domestic virtues, and women's roles as mothers of the nation. In fact, revolutionary and strongly critical critiques of patriarchal norms and male-dominated traditions were rare.

Yet, the women-run press did not entirely avoid sensitive issues. Some articles addressed the taboo subjects of sexual relationships within marriage and the problem of prostitution in major cities. This paper examines selected articles, didactic short stories, and feminist treatises from women-run periodicals. It aims to analyze how authors addressed the challenges of discussing marital sexuality while maintaining modesty. Additionally, it explores their approach to confronting the issue of prostitution as a social problem. Considering that women's circulation of ideas was gradually shifting from the oratory mode of indoor gatherings to the broader public sphere of print, this paper examines female authors' writings on two issues of sexuality in the modern constitution of marriage and prostitution in newly urbanized cities, as presented in periodicals between 1925 and 1941 (the first Pahlavi era) when the project of modernization started on a national level. Such analysis helps to analyze how the emerging public sphere necessitated the engagement of women in subjects previously dismissed as taboo or exclusively discussed by male thinkers.

Visual Public Sphere and Iranian Women, late 19th and early 20th century

by Leila Moslemi Mehnni / University of Toronto / leila.moslemimehni@mail.utoronto.ca

This paper explores the complex and evolving presence of women in Iran's public sphere through their visual representation in late 19th and early 20th century newspapers. Challenging Habermasian assumptions of women's exclusion from public life, the paper argues that Iranian women were visibly and actively engaged in social and political arenas well before Reza Shah's unveiling decree of 1936. Visual sources, particularly from women's publications like Shukūfah, Nāhīd, or Umīd, etc., depict women participating in public rituals, folk belief gatherings, and religious ceremonies, complicating simplistic binaries of public (male) and private (female) spaces.

A central theme is the role of folk and religious practices in shaping public female presence, These practices underscore women's active roles in public life. The paper contends that these engagements were not signs of backwardness, but spaces of negotiation between tradition and emerging modernities, especially as print culture began promoting education, reform, and political participation for women.

The Constitutional Revolution and its aftermath transformed women's visual representation from passive figures to agents of national identity. As nationalism intensified, women appeared in new forms, heroic, allegorical, and politically engaged, mirroring state efforts to modernize their image, yet also revealing tensions as women became subjects of state surveillance and control. Notably, images of unveiled women in European attire symbolized modernity but also exposed them to visual regulation.

Drawing on Nancy Fraser's concept of "subaltern counterpublics," the paper argues that women's presence in the visual public sphere constituted a form of counter-discourse that challenged dominant narratives of exclusion. Ultimately, the paper demonstrates that visual culture was not merely a mirror of societal change but an active site of contestation, empowerment, and redefinition of gender roles in the shaping of modern Iranian society.

A Media Archaeology between Paper and Air: Wireless Media and the Transformation of the Public Sphere in Early Pahlavi Iran, 1922–1939

by Arash Ghajarjazi / Utrecht University / arashqajar@gmail.com

This paper examines the transformation of the public sphere in the first Pahlavi period by focusing on how wireless media evolved during the 1920s and 1930s. I aim to trace how Iran's imaginaries and technologies of the wireless, in dialogue with the periodical press, reshaped the relationship between religion and politics in this period. Building on and departing from Jürgen Habermas's account of the twentieth-century shift from a bourgeois-liberal public sphere, centred on rational-critical debate among private citizens, to a managed, mass-mediated sphere dominated by state and corporate interests, I argue that the co-evolution of wireless media, particularly radio broadcasting, and the periodical press in early Pahlavi Iran offers a unique case for the historical study of modernity and the public sphere, one that allowed the Muslim clerical order to acquire new modalities of rationality and political deliberation.

In conversation with the field of media archaeology, I discuss the significance of Iran's imported nature of wireless madia. Unlike in Euro-American contexts, where broadcasting emerged from earlier domestic media technologies, wireless media in Iran was imported from ideas and technologies developed abroad. It was initially introduced to the public through illustrated articles in magazines such as Irān-shahr and Mehr, and later evolved into wireless telephony and radio networks. This intermedial dynamics familiarised Iranians with the new wireless mode of communication and its nation-building potential. The period under consideration spans from the first mention of wireless technology in the Persian periodical press in 1922 to the inaugural major Persian-language radio broadcast in 1939 from Nazi Germany's Radio Berlin Persian Service, followed

shortly thereafter by the launch of the BBC Persian Service and Radio Tehran. Drawing on periodical sources such as Āyin-e Eslām, Parcham-e Eslām, Donya-ye Eslām, and Rādiyo Tehrān, I conceptualise Iran's modern public sphere through the shifting logics and styles of communication between radio and the press, between the mediums of paper and air, in ways that enabled an expanded public presence of Islam.

The Cinematic Laboratory of Intimacy in Mid-20th Century Iran

by Negar Banisafar / University of Toronto, Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute of Iranian Studies / negar.banisafar@mail.utoronto.ca

Between the 1920s and 1960s, Iranian cinema halls functioned as laboratories of intimacy where moviegoers reimagined social norms and renegotiated their place within modern urban life. Through the movie-goers' embodied engagement with both the screen and with one another in the charged atmosphere of the darkened salon, subjects questioned inherited regimes of truth and exercised agency in shaping new subjectivities beyond the confines of dominant discourses of power. Archival sources, caricatures, and moral essays from periodicals such as Mehr, Omīd, and Dunyā-yi Islām form the basis of a genealogical reading of cinema-going as a contested cultural practice. These materials register the tensions surrounding spectatorship amid shifting public sentiments around intimacy, gendered visibility, and conduct. What was once framed as a site of moral threat became entangled with the everyday affective negotiations of desire, propriety, and relational possibility. From polemics over women's public presence to the tactile politics of spectatorship, audience practices quietly unsettled normative expectations and asserted alternative ways of relating. The cinema hall, a liminal space between the private and the public, became a site where bodies could feel, act, and relate in ways that exceeded the reach of religious, familial, or state authority. Cinema, in this context, was more than spectacle; it was a lived infrastructure of sentiment through which people tested the limits of what could be felt, imagined, and claimed as part of their lives.

Room 1.15

84. Tracking the Indo-Iranian Origin: Syntactical and Etymological Discussions

Chair: Yuchen Hu

Investigation into the diachronic dynamics of the Indo-Iranian people along with their languages and religions, although much overlooked in contemporary academia, constitutes an indispensable component of Iranian studies in general. This panel offers a unique insight, through a principally philological lens, into the early stages of Indo-Iranian cultures, exemplified by their religious iconographies and linguistic features. Two papers on Old Indo-Iranian syntax, paying dedicated attention to hypotaxis with subordinating conjunctions in Avestan and the emergence of split ergativity as periphrastic perfective participial constructions in Old Persian and Vedic respectively, showcase how a peculiar grammatical category and an idiosyncratic phenomenon with profound crosslinguistic connections may shed light upon the greater understanding of lineage of languages and heritage of civilisations in Central Asia and Indian Subcontinent. As the two systematically linguistic papers indicate, Iranian languages in their primitive forms shared remarkable similarities with their Proto-Indo-Aryan counterparts, which is evidently attested among a variety of textual documentations and has now been put forth into a well-organised dissertation. To supplement the discussion with further motivation supported by rich cultural context for such a connection, a third paper which discusses the transmutation of the daeva iconography predominantly found in Zoroastrian and Vedic traditions is also included in this panel. It illustrates from an etymological perspective how researchers may deduce evolutions in religious narrative based upon semantic shifts of theological terminologies between cognate yet diversified beliefs. Altogether, this panel attempts to contribute to the study of Iranian historiography and revitalise scholarly efforts in Iranian philology by addressing some of the most prominent arguments within the discipline with an innovative

approach, so as to advocate for more industrious attention to decaying humanity traditions in the new academic era predominantly characterised by socioeconomics and geopolitics.

Case Theory Illustrated: the Development of Split Ergativity in Indo-Iranian Languages
by Yuchen Hu / SOAS University of London / yuchenxy9214@gmail.com
Philological evidence, among various interdisciplinary ones, provides researchers with insight into a reanalysed shared ancestor of the Indo-Iranian people which inspired similar trajectories in religious, linguistic and philosophical progressions. The present study investigates the origin and diachronic development of ergativity in the Indo-Iranian languages, while paying particular attention to the emergence of ergative alignment from grammaticalization of perfect participial constructions. Although the earliest Indo-European languages have been reconstructed as nominative–accusative, it can be proposed that the Indo-Iranian branch developed a periphrastic perfect which later mutated into ergative or more accurately split-ergative systems. In Old Indo-Aryan languages such as Vedic Sanskrit, perfect participles expressing a resultative reading generally employ the grammatical agent marked by the instrumental or genitive case whereas the nominative or implicitly marked patient functioning as the syntactic subject. Similar features have also been observed in early Iranian languages, namely Old Persian and Avestan, associating past passive participles with nominal adjuncts to indicate agency. Over time, such constructions underwent grammaticalization and evolved into finite verbal forms as seen in the Middle Indo-Aryan Prakrits and less prominently in Middle Iranian: a new ergative alignment is therefore construed as the specially assigned agent is now reinterpreted to be the sentence subject. In order to trace this developmental path, I incorporate textual evidence found in primary sources through comparative methodology to argue that the split-ergativity in Indo-Iranian languages originated as a marginalised grammatical feature which in turn became an obligatory strategy, whose sensitivity to tense and aspect can also be accounted for following this proposal. This study illustrates how, at the interface of syntax and semantics, grammatical categories can be induced from seemingly irrelevant phenomena. Through Philological and typological lenses, I attempt to shed light on an overall reconstruction of the Indo-Iranian prototype and theories of grammatical shifts on a broader scale.

Gods of the Other: Re-examining the Vedic Counterparts of Avestan Daēvas
by Nezih Seven / SOAS University of London / 734336@soas.ac.uk
The standard explanation for the Avestan daēvas who possess Vedic divine counterparts is the "Zoroastrian reform" model: an internal theological revolution that demonized the old Indo-Iranian pantheon. This paper re-examines this narrative by exploring an alternative possibility: that the demonization of specific deities may reflect a historical process of "othering" the gods of neighboring, and potentially rival, Indo-Aryan groups. The inquiry focuses on the four primary daēvas with clear Vedic analogues—Indra, Sauruua, Nāŋhaiθya, and Vāyu—who form the core evidence for the reform hypothesis. The cases of Indra and Sauruua are pivotal; if their names are indeed loanwords from the Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC) substrate, it raises the question of whether they were ever truly "ancestral" Iranian gods to be demonized, or whether they were primarily associated with encountered Indo-Aryan communities. The analysis then assesses Nāŋhaiθya, where the shift from the dual Vedic Nā́satyā to a singular Avestan figure suggests a specific reinterpretation that may not fit a simple inversion model. Finally, the complex Zoroastrian treatment of Vāyu, split into a good and an evil entity, is evaluated to see if it indicates a nuanced theological recalibration rather than a straightforward demonization. By systematically weighing the etymological and textual evidence for these four figures, this paper investigates whether the data is more consistent with an internal reformation, a process of inter-ethnic boundary-making, or a

combination of both. The aim is not to dismiss the reform hypothesis but to test its limits and assess the explanatory power of a model grounded in historical interaction and the polemics of identity.

Hypotaxis with subordinating conjunctions in Avestan

by Myriadne Wang / SOAS, University of London / mw90@soas.ac.uk

This paper examines hypotaxis with subordinating conjunctions in Avestan, the ritual language of Zoroastrianism, within the wider context of Indo-Iranian and Indo-European syntax.

Avestan subordinators, like their Vedic counterparts, are historically petrified case forms or suffixed derivatives of the Indo-European relative pronominal stem *h₂i̯ó- via Indo-Iranian *i̯a-. They include hiiaṯ/yaṯ, yezī̆, yadā, yeiδi, yaṯciṯ, yaδōiṯ, yaϑā̆, yaϑrā̆, yāṯ (ablative singular), yahmiia, yahmāi, yauuaṯ, yauuatā̆, yāṯ (< *h₂i̯éh₂-n̥t), and yā.tā. These conjunctions constitute the core of Avestan subordination, introducing a range of clause types—temporal, conditional, causal, final, and explicative. Yet their syntactic behaviour has remained virtually unexplored. Previous scholarship, confined to lexicographic listings (e.g. BARTHOLOMAE) or scattered grammatical remarks, has not treated conjunctional usage systematically within the corpus.

Drawing on a comprehensive corpus survey, this study analyses the formal and semantic distribution of these conjunctions across Old and Young Avestan, focusing on liturgical texts such as the Yasna, Vidēvdād, and the Yašts. This analysis integrates verbal tense-mood patterns and semantic-functional categories. Particular attention is paid to diachronic shifts in the syntax and function of Avestan subordinators and to their Indo-Aryan (Vedic) counterparts. Particular emphasis is placed on diachronic developments and Indo-Aryan (Vedic) comparison. The evidence reveals both shared Indo-Iranian inheritance and innovations distinctive to Iranian. For instance, Avestan yezi-conditionals, prominent in the Vidēvdād, preserve an older Indo-Iranian hypotactic pattern parallel to Vedic yádi/yád-clauses, yet acquire unique prescriptive and juridical functions absent in Vedic.

By tracing such divergences and correspondences, the paper demonstrates how historical change and discourse function jointly shape the evolution of subordinating constructions. The findings refine our understanding of Avestan syntax, contribute to the reconstruction of Indo-Iranian hypotaxis, and shed light on broader Indo-European historical syntax by illuminating the evolution of hypotactic strategies across related traditions.

Room 1.16

85. Global Afterlives: Contemporary Translations of Persian Literature

Chair: Laetitia Nanquette, Samad Alavi

Global Afterlives: Contemporary Translations of Persian Literature brings together scholars and practitioners working on recent translations of Persian fiction, poetry, and other literary genres into languages including English, Italian, French, and Norwegian. By considering multiple and varied linguistic contexts, the panel seeks a broader understanding of how and why Persian literature circulates in global markets. The panel addresses questions regarding what kinds of texts or writers become selected for translation, which translations achieve critical or (relative) market success, and how such works are promoted or marketed for the audiences who read them in translation. In addition, the panel sheds light on the aesthetic and political considerations that shape the translation process. While previous scholarship has highlighted publishers' disproportionate interest in memoirs by Iranians written in or translated to English, this panel draws attention to genres beyond memoir, writers from beyond Iran, and/or languages beyond English to consider the various afterlives that Persian literature experiences as it travels through global languages and markets.

Translation as Social Integration: Persian Poetry Commissioned for Norwegian Publics

by Samad Alavi / University of Oslo / s.j.alavi@ikos.uio.no

Aschehoug publishing house commissions foreign-language poets living in Norway to compose poems in their own languages and then to work with a team of translators to render them into Norwegian. The results are a series of high-quality chapbooks under the title Parallell. The series includes two parallel Persian/Norwegian collections, Hun er ikke kvinne (zan nist) (2022) by Fatemeh Ekhtesari (b. Iran, 1986) and Måne på flukt fra natta (māh gorizān az shab) (2024) by Khaleda Froagh (b. Afghanistan, 1972). This paper investigates the material and discursive conditions that make both collections possible. In a country of less than six million, one hardly expects a poetry collection from an already minor language to produce significant financial profit. Thus, the paper asks, absent financial rewards or global prestige, what, motivates the Parallell series and how is it sustained? Whereas Venuti famously identifies an ethics of "domestication" that shapes the ways some translators render foreign texts legible for their domestic markets, the Parallell series, with its explicit invitation for the poets to compose with the translation already in mind, suggests a different understanding of translation. Here, translation functions as a form of social integration, on the one hand inviting the poet to create original, "foreign" work and at the same time to participate in the process of adapting the work to serve the dominant language and therefore the society where the poet has come to reside. Translation as integration thus suggests a model of liberal multiculturalism that extends beyond the literary into social and political debates. Through close readings of Ekhtesari's and Froagh's collections and interviews with the poets and translators, the paper ultimately asks how contemporary Persian poetry and, by extension, Iranian and Afghan writers, experience integration into the multicultural Norwegian literary scene and how that might inform diaspora studies today.

Afghan Women's Literature in English Translation: Contemporary Anglophone Literary Politics
by Anna Learn / University of Washington / annalearn8@gmail.com
This paper will present an analytical survey of recent anthologies of Afghan women's literature in English translation from Persian & Pashto. Specifically, the paper will consider four anthologies of Afghan women's writing published in the last five years, including the multi-authored short story collections My Pen is the Wing of a Bird, Under a Kabul Sky, and the Words Without Borders online collection titled "Writing by Afghan Women," in addition to a recent multi-authored poetry collection Hair on Fire: Afghan Women Poets. This paper will ask: why has there been a mini-boom of short form, multi-author translated anthologies in the anglophone literary market that explicitly use the category "Afghan women" in their title or in their promotional branding? Why aren't there more single-author collections of female Afghan writers' works appearing in translation, or collections that do not use gender or nationality as their chosen markers, but which include female Afghan writers? What literary politics do these translated collections profess, and how do anglophone readers receive these literary-political messages?

New Pathways for Persian Literary Translation in Italy: Ponte33, Brioschi, and the Making of a Market
by Giacomo Longhi / La Sapienza University of Rome / giacomo.longhi@uniroma1.it
Between 2010 and 2019, the landscape of Persian literary translation in Italy underwent a profound transformation marked by the emergence of initiatives that combined philological and linguistic expertise with an awareness of audience and market dynamics. The establishment of the publishing house Ponte33 in 2010 and, a few years later, the creation of the series "Gli Altri" by Brioschi Editore inaugurated a new phase of direct translations from Persian and a deliberate process of literary scouting focused on authors from Iran and the wider Persophone world.
Both ventures are characterized by strong cultural coherence and were made possible through the initiative of scholars such as Felicetta Ferraro and Anna Vanzan, who acted as mediators between

academic research and publishing practice. Their scholarly competence, first-hand knowledge of Iran, and field experience enabled a genuinely informed vision of Persian literary production, breaking with the long-standing Italian tendency to rely on intermediary translations in English or French and, more broadly, on diasporic voices writing for Western audiences. Instead, these projects sought to represent the internal vitality of Iran's literary scene and to foreground works circulating within the country itself.

Through the analysis of catalogues, promotional strategies, and paratexts, this paper explores how Ponte33 and Brioschi contributed to the professionalization of Persian-Italian literary translation and to the formation of a curious yet non-specialist readership. These efforts not only integrated Persian literature into the Italian book market but also paved the way for a more direct dialogue between Iranian and Italian publishers, most notably with Našr-e Češme which in recent years has become increasingly active in international fairs such as Frankfurt. The decade thus represents a decisive moment in which translation from Persian in Italy emerges as both a professional practice and a form of cultural diplomacy, fostering new circuits of collaboration and visibility between the two literary systems.

Room 1.17

86. Negotiating Worlds: Adaptation and Interpretation in Indo-Persian Literary Thought

Chair: Zakir Hussein

This panel examines negotiation as a central mode of Indo-Persian literary and intellectual production. From epic and chronicle to poetics, hagiography, and philosophical verse, Persianate authors in South Asia continually tested the limits of the forms and ideas they inherited, adapting them to new linguistic, religious, and cultural contexts. Through such acts of mediation, they developed distinctive Indo-Persian idioms of literary theory, historical imagination, and metaphysical reflection that challenge modern boundaries between imitation and innovation, worldview and representation.

One paper explores how early Indo-Persian writers reconfigured Shāhnāmaic paradigms to interpret the Indian world before them, while Indic literatures in turn re-appropriated the very same Perso-Islamic tropes. These reciprocal readings reveal how epic and historiography intertwined, producing shared moral geographies that mapped empire, aesthetics, and wonder onto one another. Another paper examines Amīr Khusraw's engagement with Arabic poetics and Qurʾānic hermeneutics, showing how he redefined poetry not as embellishment but as ʿilm, a mode of knowing in which ambiguity discloses divine truth. A seventeenth-century Persian masnavī from the Punjab likewise demonstrates how narrative can become a site of sanctification; its author constructs holiness and authority within his own historical logic, while also prompting reflection on the modern interpretive frames—sexual, historical, or devotional—through which such texts continue to be read. This discussion extends into Bēdil of Delhi's meditations on tanāsukh (metempsychosis), tracing how he brought disparate Islamic-Neoplatonic and Hindu cosmologies into conversation through his poetry, transforming inherited philosophical vocabularies into tools for comparing and contrasting divergent understandings of the soul's journey.

Together, these papers illuminate Indo-Persian literature as an evolving site of translation and contestation, where intellectual and poetic forms were never merely inherited but continually reinterpreted to articulate new worlds of meaning.

Between Epic and History: The Shāhnāmaic Imagination in Indo-Persian Literature

by Zakir Hussein Gul / Harvard University / zakir_gul@g.harvard.edu

What can the semantic afterlives of demon–deities tell us about the shifting boundaries between epic poetry and historiography in Indo-Persian literature? This paper traces an arc from Zoroaster's revaluation of the daēva as demon rather than deity to Firdawsī's Shāhnāma, wherein this pre-

Islamic shift is both inherited and Islamised. Firdawsī's paradigmatic depictions of the White Demon of Māzandarān and the akvān dīv provided the blueprint through which later Indo-Persian writers made sense of the devs inhabiting Indic lifeworlds before them.
In early Indo-Persian texts, the bleeding of epic into history is most evident in works like Amīr Khusraw's Khazāʾin al-Futūḥ, wherein peninsular India is mapped onto Firdawsī's moral geography. A different but related transformation appears in a key hagiography recounting Muʿīn al-Dīn Chishtī's decision to settle in Ajmer, which frames encounters with local deities through a mixture of Qurʾānic and Shāhnāmaic demonology.
Indic literary and performative traditions, in turn, reasserted the primordial deva–asura conflict, recasting the new arrivals as demonic in their own right and transforming the Perso-Islamic reduction of dev-cum-demon into a site of local reclamation. The dīv–dev polarity was thus never a one-sided imposition but a shared, reciprocal idiom through which Indic and Islamicate literary communities made sense of one another in what Francesca Orsini has termed a multilingual "literary multiverse." Foregrounding this 'demon–deity undecidable' situates the Persian epic within debates on imitation in the 'post-classical' Persian tradition in general and the Indian context in particular. It reveals literature itself as the lens through which history was written and made sense of, and through which the boundaries between emic and etic, centre and periphery, and myth and history were continually renegotiated.

Seven Faces in a Mirror: Amīr Khusraw and The Poetics of Knowing
by Ilma Qureshi / University of Virginia / iq5sb@virginia.edu
Amīr Khusraw played a central role in developing Indo-Persian aesthetics and poetics, laying the foundation for a distinct Indo-Persian literary heritage that remains alive in contemporary South Asia. As Lara Harb and Alexander Key have pointed out, Arabic literary critics and thinkers often viewed poetry as merely "evoking emotions," "using symbolic language to appeal to masses," or using imagination (khayāl) to "rearrange mental contents," and "fabricate truth." This paper argues that Khusraw reimagines poetry as not merely a mode of imagination and emotion, but rather an epistemological principle. Basing his claim on Qur'ānic hermeneutics, Khusraw argues for poetry to be the best vessel for conveying knowledge and wisdom (ḥikma). Comparing ambiguity (īhām)–which, for Khusraw, is a distinguishing feature of poetry–to a mirror, Khusraw claims that while ordinary mirrors only show one face, īhām is like a mirror that shows seven true and luminous meanings at once, like seven faces in a mirror. Khusraw not only stresses the existence of multiple meanings but also emphasizes that they are simultaneously true (durust). Khusraw rejected the idea that īham meant deception; for Khusraw, these meanings are reflections of truth, with God as the ultimate writer who continually writes the cosmos. Khusraw bases his claim on Qur'ānic hermeneutics as ḥikma means not merely understanding Qur'ānic injunctions but also the ability to apply those meanings in various contexts. In this way, Khusraw redefines poetry not as ornamentation or imagination but as a mode of knowing—one through which divine truth continually reveals itself in language.

Transmigrating Meanings: The Poetics of Tanāsukh in Bēdil's Masnavi ʿIrfān
by Hajnalka Kovacs / Independent Scholar / hajnal992@gmail.com
The belief in the transmigration of the soul, or, metempsychosis (tanāsukh), is often described in Islamic accounts as a defining feature of "the religion of the Indians" and as a tenet incompatible with the Qurʾānic worldview. Yet in the broader history of Islam's encounter with Indic thought, this doctrine drew less polemical attention than more visible practices such as the use of images in worship, the powers of the jogis, or the perceived affinities between Sufi and Vedantic metaphysics.

The late Mughal poet Mīrzā ʿAbd al-Qādir Bēdil (1644–1720), celebrated for his intricate style and his deep engagement with both Islamic and Indic metaphysics, takes up the question of tanāsukh in his final long mystico-philosophical masnavi, ʿIrfān. In Chapter Five, devoted to ḥikmat (philosophy) as one possible path toward perfection, Bēdil embeds his discussion of Hindu metempsychosis within an Islamic–Neoplatonic framework describing the created world's ascent toward completion.
This paper argues that Bēdil reinterprets the Hindu view of metempsychosis by appropriating the term tanāsukh—along with the semantically related terms naskh, raskh, faskh, and maskh—from post-classical Islamic philosophical and theological discourse, applying them in a non-technical sense to describe the qualitative transformations between the kingdoms of creation and their culmination in Man, the most perfect being. In this perspective, the Hindu understanding of the soul's rebirth appears as a partial yet meaningful attempt to grasp the diversity, origin, and telos of life. By transforming inherited philosophical vocabularies into tools of comparative reflection, Bēdil turns poetry into a medium of dialogue, placing Islamic–Neoplatonic and Hindu cosmologies in conversation within the intellectual universe of late Mughal India.

Reading a Saint: Text, Body, and Sanctity in Ḥaqīqat al-Fuqarāʾ
by Ilgin Nas / Harvard University Graduate School of Arts an Sciences / inas@fas.harvard.edu
Shāh Ḥusayn (1538–1599), commonly known as Mādhō Lāl Ḥusayn, is a Punjabi Sufi saint from Lahore. The most extensive account of his life appears in the hagiographical masnavī Ḥaqīqat al-Fuqarāʾ, composed in 1662–63 by Shaykh Maḥmūd, a Sufi master devoted to Shāh Ḥusayn. The text portrays Ḥusayn as a divinely chosen figure who, after thirty years of ascetic piety at the shrine of ʿAlī Hujwīrī, embraces an antinomian mode of Sufism and falls in love with a Brahmin youth named Mādhō.
Existing scholarship, including works by Lajwanti Rama-Krishna and Scott Kugle, has tended to treat the Ḥaqīqat as a historical account in the Western positivist sense, selectively reading it to reconstruct the "real" Shāh Ḥusayn. In contrast, this paper reads the Ḥaqīqat as a creative representation: a text composed within a specific socio-historical milieu to perform "holy-making" and didactic functions for its audience. Accordingly, it argues that a more productive approach to the text is to ask how Shaykh Maḥmūd constructs Shāh Ḥusayn's sanctity and to what ends, and to answer these questions by situating the text within its socio-historical, intellectual, and literary contexts.
To model this approach, the paper offers a close, contextualized reading of Chapter 24 of the Ḥaqīqat al-Fuqarāʾ, which depicts Ḥusayn's physical intimacy with Mādhō during a solitary retreat as interpreted from several perspectives. Whereas previous scholarship has selectively read this episode to argue that Ḥusayn's sexuality was queer, this paper instead reads it holistically and "along the grain" of the author's commentary to reveal its dual function: first, to demonstrate the exceptionality of Shāh Ḥusayn's body and establish it as the foundation for an institutional structure around his legacy; and second, to instruct its audience on how to perceive the inner reality of an antinomian figure like Shāh Ḥusayn.

Room 1.18

87. War and Polyphony: Representing and Remembering the Iran-Iraq War in Contemporary Cultural Production

Chair: Nahid Siamdoust, Amir Moosavi

The Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) was the longest two-state war of the 20th century. Although sometimes called "a forgotten war" by pundits in the English-speaking world, within Iran, this war continues to be the subject of cultural representation and political debate. During the war years, the Iranian government harnessed the country's cultural sphere and incentivized artists, writers, and filmmakers to support the war effort by creating works that endorsed the state narrative of the war.

After the war ended, the state's tight control of the war story gradually loosened, giving rise to a polyphonic field that encompasses various, sometimes conflicting, narratives of the war and its myriad consequences.
This multidisciplinary panel takes a closer look at how, more than three decades since the war's conclusion, the Iran-Iraq war continues to shape artistic production across literature, non-fiction, film, television series, and photography. The papers examine questions such as: Why do writers, filmmakers, and artists continue to address the war in their works, and how are they doing so in relation to the politically tumultuous decades Iran has faced since the war's end? Are artists still debating the war's original stakes or have war-related cultural interventions opened new spaces of debate and ventured into treating related but different topics? Ultimately, what are the broader implications of revisiting this conflict today?
Two papers in this panel specifically take up literary representations of the war both in Persian and English in works published within Iran and the Anglophone world, and their connections to the politics of translation as well as emergent Persian genre fiction. A third paper addresses the role of salient role of biography in recent examples of Sacred Defense cinema and television series. A final paper takes up the material dimension of remembering traumatic events and their artistic representations by focusing on art photographers' recent reconfigurations of war memory.

Who Cares about a "Forgotten War?": The Iran-Iraq War in recent works of English language literature.

by Amir Moosavi / Rutgers University / am2521@newark.rutgers.edu

Since the 1980s, the war with Iraq has occupied a major place in the Persian language literary production of Iran. Whether published by state-sponsored presses that often frame their texts as "Sacred Defense Literature" or independent presses that publish literature that deals with the war in many ways, prose and poetry that treats the Iran-Iraq War and its consequences have become distinct genres and subgenres in Iranian literature. As such, these publications exist in a politically charged literary field, oftentimes addressing a readership that can remember the war firsthand, and usually with high stakes in the representation of the history of the present.
However, if there are clearcut stakes to writing and publishing about the war within Iran, the publication of literature about this conflict outside Iran seems not only less urgent but almost anachronistic. Nevertheless, in recent years major literary presses in the US and the UK have published several novels that center on the Iran-Iraq War, a war that is repeatedly referred to as a "Forgotten War" in English language media and has virtually no point of reference in popular culture. Based on a longer article in progress, this presentation will address three such novels–Mahmud Dowlatabadi's Thirst, Shahriyar Mandanipur's Moon Brow, and Kaveh Akbar's Martyr!–to ask how these works function within the broader literary landscape of writing about this war between Iran and the ever-expanding Iranian diasporic and exilic communities. Whether it is a novel "born in translation" by a major author still living in Iran, one published in exile by an exiled author, or a best-selling novel that employs fictional memories of a homeland to narrate a diasporic Iranian experience, this paper asks what it means to engage with a "forgotten war," connect it to the present, and introduce it to audiences that have potentially zero knowledge of it.

Tactile Memories: Objects of the Iran-Iraq War in the Work of Contemporary Iranian Artists

by Hoda Nedaeifar / University of Toronto / h.nedaif@gmail.com

In the 2000s and 2010s, a generation of artists born after the revolution produced several examples of contemporary art that revisited the memory of the Iran-Iraq War. Some of these postwar recollections unfolded, among other strategies, through a tactile engagement with objects. This paper first explores the material dimension of remembering the traumatic event by examining war

memorabilia, headbands, martyr hejlehs, and cemetery photo cases. It then analyzes examples in which contemporary artists Babak Kazemi, Shadi Ghadirian, and Mahmoud Bakhshi reconfigure traumatic memory through the photographing of found militaria or the fabrication of objects that evoke traces of conflict. The paper suggests that their work points to a recurring visual trope in imagery and photographs from the Iran–Iraq War: the hypercorporeality prevalent in post-revolutionary visual culture, particularly in photobooks from the 1980s. It also highlights how, in this transformation, the objects function as surrogates for human bodies, replacing literal and figural representation with material presence.

Hunting the Serial Killer: War Story, Crime Fiction, or Human Rights Manifesto?
by Goulia Ghardashkhani / University of Bamberg / goulia.ghardashkhani@uni-bamberg.de
Even nearly four decades after the end of the Iran-Iraq War, its memory—still a highly contested category—continues to surface in Iranian fiction. While institutional support, surveillance, and restrictions remain constant, alternatives to the state's narrative—challenging its Shi'i-inspired redemptive logic of good versus evil—have nevertheless entered the literary market, becoming more frequent than before over the past fifteen years, though at times followed by the revocation of already issued publishing permits.
Focusing on Mohammad Rezayirad's 2021 novel Hofreh (The pit), this paper examines one of the most versatile instances of recent Iranian war fiction, a work that exceeds its generic category in both literary and ideological terms. Its dual plotline alternates between war fiction and a full-fledged crime novel: the wartime protagonist of the former becomes the antagonist of the latter, a serial killer.
By situating Hofreh at the intersection of anti-ideological war narratives, the lagged but gradual emergence of genre fiction in Iran, and the conventional role of Persian fiction as a locus of political debate, this paper explores the implications of such cross-generic mutations for contemporary Persian literature. What kinds of spaces does genre fiction open for readers when addressing ideologically charged themes and topics? And how do such mutations challenge or expand the formal and ideological boundaries of established literary genres in Iran?

Dead Men Make Good Heroes: Biography and the Cinema of the Iran-Iraq War
by Niki Akhavan / Catholic University of America / akhavan@cua.edu
In a very broad sense, most of the films and television series in the "Sacred Defense" genre are based on the lives of soldiers and veterans of the Iran-Iraq war. A quarter century after the end of that conflict, however, several significant works placed known figures at the center of their narratives, indicating a possible biographical turn in the genre. Ebrahim Hatamikia's Ch (2013), Mohammad Hossein Mahdavian' television docuseries The Last Days of Winter (2012) and his film Standing in the Dust (2016), Hadi Hejazifar's The Situation of Mehdi (2022), and Siavash Sarmadi's "Mansur" (2021) are all examples of a rising interest in telling the stories of real figures of the Iran-Iraq war. Through an examination of texts such as these, this paper interrogates the rhetorical and political function that biographical storytelling enables.

Room 2.17

88. Beyond Political Fragmentation: Diasporic Collective Memory and Reenactment of the Constitutional Past after Woman, Life, Freedom

Chair: Ladan Rahbari

This panel addresses key scholarly concerns in the aftermath of the Woman, Life, Freedom (WLF) uprising and the ongoing movement(s) among Iranian populations both inside and outside the country inspired by it. The presentations foreground shifting terrains of resistance and gender politics by examining counter-narratives to popular mythologies, the memory practices of migrants, the

meaning and representation of martyrdom in visual culture, and the role of WLF in catalyzing diasporic mobilization. Drawing on interpretive and qualitative research, the panel seeks to capture the depth and complexity of memory, symbolism, and activism. Adopting a transnational perspective and recognizing diaspora communities as integral to collective grief, resistance, and collective identity, the panel highlights forms of resistance that can both sustain and challenge cohesion within the existing movement(s). Positioned within broader scholarly debates in postcolonial and social movement theory, transnationalism, visual culture, and the study of martyrdom, the panel demonstrates how the WLF uprising has reshaped understandings of social change in Iran and illuminated the roles of gender, diaspora, and collective action in contemporary social movements.

Anti-Colonial Rhetoric, (Neo)colonial Violence: "Woman, Life, Freedom" and Unmasking Political Myths through a Gendered Lens

by Ladan Rahbari / University of Amsterdam / l.rahbari@uva.nl

The Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) has often presented itself both to the outside world and its own citizens as an anti-colonial state that fights the colonial domination of the Western world. Using both soft power and authoritarian control strategies, and reinforced and repeated within educational material, media narratives, and cultural productions, this framing has been part of the state propaganda, and both known to and resisted by many Iranians. The IRI's (ab)use of such rhetoric has several internal and external political goals, such as national, regional, and international legitimization, fearmongering and creating moral panics to maintain political control, and weaponizing anti-colonial sentiments for scapegoating and externalizing blame. This paper argues that the Woman, Life, Freedom (WLF) uprising and the many movements that were generated within it weakened the power and hegemony of the IRI's anti-colonial myth at the national level, while facing challenges in creating the same narrative rupture regionally. The paper uses the events, cultural productions, and slogans of WLF to show how this rupture exposes the hypocrisy of the anti-colonial myth, particularly by focusing on the role of gender and to critique versions of anti-colonialism that ignore gendered questions.

Performing Memory, Cultivating Resistance: Iranian Migrants' Practices in Urban Cultural Spaces After the 2022 Uprising

by Somita Sabeti / Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Italy, and School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg, Sweden / somita.sabeti@unive.it

Iran has long been a site of struggle for freedom and justice, most recently vividly enacted through the Woman, Life, Freedom uprising of 2022. This moment resonated not only within the country but also across diaspora communities worldwide. It shaped how Iranians navigate identity, memory, and collective action while negotiating the liminal space between country of origin and host country. Scholars note that the uprising marked an awakening for a diaspora often seen as fragmented, as grief and anger were channeled into collective action, even as divisions and competing visions of Iran's future persist and have further deepened (Kashani-Sabet, 2023; Tohidi, 2023). This paper examines how Iranian migrant communities cultivate everyday practices of resistance, deeply entwined with memory and shaped by gender and generational differences. It draws on multi-sited ethnographic research across four urban cultural spaces: a theatre scene, a coffee bar, a cineforum, and a digital and on-site history circle. The study considers how memory and resistance mutually reinforce one another in transnational diaspora contexts shaped by migratory trajectories.
Drawing on Vineetha Sinha's (2021) emphasis on diasporic sensibilities, consciousness, and individual subjectivity, this paper investigates how Iranian communities in exile engage with memory as a dynamic, lived practice that responds to and reflects socio-political events in their country of origin and across transnational contexts. I aim to explore how these practices may operate as modes of

cultural resistance, where creative expression and collective memory serve as evolving sites of agency, self-definition, and dissent. This exploration is grounded in data collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and observational sketching. The aim is to provide a nuanced, open-ended representation of the diaspora's political and cultural life, attentive to its diversity, contradictions, and ongoing negotiations of belonging and identity.
Keywords: Iranian Diaspora Studies; Migration Studies; Resistance Studies, Memory Studies

Visualizing a New Martyrdom: Who Becomes a Hero in Post-WLF Iran?
by Nilou Yekta / Utrecht University / n.yekta@uu.nl
In Iran's offline public sphere, streets, murals, and statues dedicated to men who died for the Islamic Republic illustrate how the state's visual regime monumentalizes male sacrifice while marginalizing women's commemorative presence. Since WLF, Iranians have sought to reclaim women's visibility under severe constraints: through graffiti, wall inscriptions, and ephemeral memorials, and more significantly through an online visual culture in which the female body is honored and celebrated in acts of song, dance, and mourning – memorializing lives sacrificed by the regime, not for it. Many supporters of the movement, both inside and outside Iran, have embraced the discourse of martyrdom, describing figures like Jina Mahsa Amini as "martyrs for freedom" or "martyrs for the cause." Yet the rearticulation of martyrdom catalyzed by WLF, commemorating women's resistance, courage, and sacrifice, remains critically underexplored. This paper situates this discourse within a genealogy of visualized martyrdom, tracing how iconic images and moments of death in Iranian protest culture have reshaped martyrdom. It draws on visual and discourse analysis of Instagram content, including protest graffiti, digital commemorations, and viral videos, to explore how WLF re-signifies martyrdom in secular, gendered, and embodied ways.

Room 2.18

89. Rethinking Political Islam in Revolutionary and Post-revolutionary Iran: Apparatus of Control, Embodied Resistance, and Languages of Liberation

Chair: Ehsan Kashfi

This panel examines the multifaceted relationship between religion and politics in modern Iran, tracing its development from revolutionary mobilization to post-Islamist reconfigurations and contemporary forms of embodied resistance. Far from representing a linear trajectory from faith to secular modernity, Iran's political and religious history reveals a dynamic and contested field in which diverse actors—clerics, intellectuals, and citizens alike—have struggled over the meanings of justice, freedom, and authenticity.
The panel collectively asks how religious discourses have served both as instruments of domination and as resources for emancipation. It highlights how, before and after the 1979 Revolution, competing interpretations of Islam—from liberationist and egalitarian to authoritarian and hierarchical—have shaped Iran's political culture. Revisiting the revolutionary moment and its aftermath, the papers challenge reductionist readings that equate the politicization of Islam with clerical authoritarianism. Instead, they uncover a broader spectrum of progressive Muslim thought that envisioned Islam as a source of ethical renewal, participatory democracy, and social justice.
At the same time, the panel foregrounds the tension between state power and popular resistance, showing how religion has been both institutionalized as an apparatus of control and reclaimed as a language of dissent. The discussion extends beyond ideology to the embodied and everyday dimensions of this struggle. Bringing together historical, theoretical, and feminist perspectives, the panel situates Iran's religious politics within global debates on secularism, post-Islamism, and the decolonization of modernity.

From Liberation Theology to Clerical Hegemony: Progressive Muslims and the 1979 Revolution

by Mojtaba Mahdavi / University of Alberta / mojtaba.mahdavi@ualberta.ca
Pre-revolutionary Iran was characterized by diverse and competing cultural and political discourses rather than a monolithic Islamist culture. Alongside secular leftist and nationalist movements and the quietist clergy, a wide spectrum of Islamic interpretations shaped the revolutionary landscape. These included Khomeinism, Mehdi Bāzargān's liberal-democratic Islam, the Mojahedin-e Khalq's guerrilla ideology, and Ali Shari'ati's Islamic-leftist liberation theology. Yet, only Khomeinism emerged as the hegemonic voice of the 1979 revolution, raising critical questions about why other religious or secular alternatives were unable to mobilize comparable influence.
Conventional scholarship often attributes Khomeinism's ascendancy to the politicization of Islam by modern Muslim intellectuals, particularly Ali Shari'ati, whose efforts to modernize Islamic discourse are said to have empowered the clergy and paved the way for Khomeini's theory of velāyat-e faqih. Critics across the spectrum—from right-wing populists lamenting the "Fetneh 57" to leftist and liberal thinkers viewing the revolution as a setback for democracy and development—share the view that public religion hindered Iran's "linear" progression toward secular modernity. This reasoning echoes Bizhan Jazani's influential argument in Mārksism-e eslāmi yā eslām-e mārksisti?, which claimed that the modernization of Islam would ultimately benefit the clergy.
With the Islamic Republic's failure to fulfill the emancipatory promises of 1979 and the destructive policies of the ruling crony clerical oligarchy, this line of critique has gained renewed traction. This paper seeks to historicize and problematize such claims. First, it explores the structural and agential factors—beyond the mere "ideologization of Islam"—that prevented other discourses from challenging Khomeinism's rise. Second, it interrogates the myth of a unilinear path toward secularization and the complex role of public religion in Iran. Finally, it reassesses the contributions of progressive Muslim intellectuals to Iran's ongoing struggles for freedom, social justice, and democratization.

Political Islam and Progressive Politics: Post-Islamist Muslim Left à la Habibollah Peyman
by Siavash Saffari / Seoul National University / siasaffari@gmail.com
Veteran politician and public intellectual Habibollah Peyman (b. 1935) made his entry into Iranian politics in the late 1940s as a member of The Movement of God-Worshipping Socialists. Now in the ninth decade of his life, Peyman remains one of the best-known and most influential representatives of the Muslim Left in Iran. This paper offers a preliminary assessment of Peyman's particular brand of "political Islam." After a brief overview of Peyman's major political and intellectual contributions, the paper will pose its central question: to what extent might Peyman's political and intellectual interventions be said to be compatible with progressive politics? The latter is broadly defined as a modality of political practice centered on the ideals of participatory democracy, inclusive human rights, socioeconomic justice, and gender equality. To properly frame Peyman's iteration of political Islam, the paper will draw from existing academic works on the intersection of religion and politics in contemporary Iran. In particular, drawing on the scholarship on Iranian Islamism(s) and post-Islamism(s), the paper will argue that Peyman's intervention helped to facilitate a post-Islamist turn in Iranian politics in the 1990s and 2000s. To further elaborate on the key features of political Islam à la Peyman, the paper will further distinguish the latter from the mainstream current of Iranian post-Islamism, which has shaped various iterations of Reformism (eslahat) since the late 1990s. It will be argued that while mainstream Iranian post-Islamism has tended to emphasize liberal electoral politics and economic neoliberalism, Peyman has opted to advocate grassroots politics, participatory democracy, and economic egalitarianism. Identifying Peyman as a representative of a Leftist current in Iranian post-Islamism, the paper will end with an assessment of the limitations and capacities of his project for present and future trajectories of progressive politics in Iran.

The Female Body and the Subject of Resistance: Beyond the Reductionist Logics of "Islamic Authenticity" and "Islamic Oppression"

by Azadeh Shabani / Postdoctoral Researcher at the University of Kassel (Global Partnership Network Graduate School), working on Critical Theory, Decolonial Thought, and Political Philosophy.
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This presentation examines the relationship between religion and politics in Iran through the lens of the female body. Both before and after the Revolution, the female body has been a central site of political and religious contestation. Whether through compulsory veiling or the forced unveiling policies, the state and religion have treated women's bodies as instruments for displaying legitimacy, modernity, or religiosity, thereby turning them into an "ideological billboard." Following the 1979 Revolution, the religious-political order made the female body a cornerstone of its legitimacy and regulated it through family law, restrictions on employment, gender segregation, and control over reproduction. Yet within this very framework, women have forged strategies of resistance — ranging from everyday acts of defiance in dress to diverse forms of social resistance — transforming the female body from an "object of control" into a "subject of resistance." Moreover, each generation of women has lived a distinct experience of this struggle: compulsory unveiling under Reza Shah, modernization accompanied by cultural control under Mohammad Reza Shah, and compulsory veiling alongside expanded access to education under the Islamic Republic. This historical memory has accumulated in women's embodied experiences and erupted in recent movements. At the global level, the Iranian woman's body has been reduced to a symbol of either "Islamic authenticity" or "Islamic oppression," caught between two competing logics of power: the domestic religious-national order and the secular-colonial gaze of the West. The presentation concludes that the relationship between religion and politics in Iran is most vividly revealed on the terrain of the female body — a body that is not merely an instrument of legitimization, but also a site of resistance, redefinition of freedom, and production of alternative politics. Any future understanding of the relation between religion and politics in Iran is inconceivable without acknowledging these women's resistances.

Room 2.19

90. Embodied Cosmologies: Devotion, Knowledge, and Esoteric Traditions in the Premodern Islamicate World

Chair: Laura Tribuzio

This roundtable, part of the ERC Synergy Project *MOSAIC* (*Mapping Occult Sciences Across Islamicate Cultures*), looks at the ways cosmology and the occult sciences shaped ethics, political authority, and scholarly practice in the Islamicate world. Disciplines such as alchemy, astrology, talismanic knowledge, and divination were not seen as marginal curiosities but as key to thinking about how the human body related to the larger cosmos and to systems of power. Alongside the papers prepared within *MOSAIC*, the roundtable also features a contribution on Sufi cosmology in South Asia, drawing attention to the diverse religious environments in which these ideas took shape. Read together, the papers suggest that cosmological speculation was less a matter of abstract theory than of lived practice, guiding ethical conduct, supporting political claims, and providing common languages of knowledge across different regions and traditions.

Laura Tribuzio (UCLouvain) studies the Persian *Mujmal al-ḥikma* (13th c.), where embryology and mineralogy are recast through alchemy and astrology. Semen and planetary conjunctions mirror each other, linking natural generation to sovereignty and prophecy.

Ahmed Tahir Nur (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona) examines Taşköprüzade's *Miftāḥ al-saʿāda* (d. 1561), which places magic, marvels, and miracles within a structured encyclopaedia of the sciences. Wonders, occult properties, and saintly powers appear as integral parts of a connected cosmology.

Dominique Alexandra Sirgy (University of South Carolina) examines Hussein ʿAqīlī Rustamdārī's *Riyāż al-abrār* (*The Gardens of the Righteous*), composed for Shah Tahmasp in Safavid Iran. By comparing it with al-Rāzī's *Jāmiʿ al-ʿulūm*, she shows how Rustamdārī reorganizes the occult sciences around lettrism, practice, and the ethical relationship between human beings and the cosmos.
Anwesha Sengupta (Columbia University / Leiden University) examines the prologues of Malik Muhammad Jayasi's *Padmāvat*, *Kanhāvat*, and *Akhiri Kalam* (d. 1542), showing how Hindu gods are placed within a cosmology that affirms the Muslim Creator's supremacy while adapting Sufi ideas into the Avadhi vernacular.

Semen as Frot: Occult and Living Cosmologies of Political Power in the Mujmal al-ḥikma
by Laura Tribuzio / Catholic University of Louvain (UCLouvain) / laura.tribuzio@uclouvain.be
Semen as froth, coagulating into a clot and animated by celestial forces, is described in the Mujmal al-ḥikma — a thirteenth-century anonymous Persian abridgement of the Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ— as the human counterpart to the alchemical mixture of mercury and sulphur that generates minerals. This image is not only about natural generation. It shows how the Persian compendium reframed the Ikhwān's philosophy in the idioms of the occult sciences, creating a language in which body, matter, and cosmos could also serve questions of power.
Unlike the Arabic Rasāʾil, which explain mineral formation through vapours and treat embryology in general philosophical terms, the Mujmal introduces both the sulphur-mercury theory and the technical apparatus of astrology. Generation becomes a double process: the mixture of substances in the womb parallels the alignments of planets in the heavens, each shaping the form and fate of the living being.
This shift comes out most clearly in the section on the Sun's governance during the fourth month of embryogenesis. Where the Rasāʾil mention only the appearance of the animal soul, the Mujmal links this stage to kingship and prophecy. It even states that birth under the ascendant of a planetary conjunction may yield a prophet, with miracles and law defined through house analysis.
Read in this way, the Mujmal al-ḥikma is not simply a commentary but a hinge text. It makes visible how embryology — semen, blood, and womb — could be rewritten in alchemical and astrological terms and entangled with questions of authority. These reworkings anticipate the later Timurid, Safavid, and Mughal uses of occult sciences in political culture.

Rustamdārī's Lettrist, Practice-Oriented Cosmologies and the Classification of the Occult Sciences in his Encyclopedia *The Gardens of the Righteous*
by Dominique Sirgy / postdoctoral fellow with the Mapping Occult Sciences in Islamic Cultures (MOSAIC). / dominiquesirgy@gmail.com
This presentation explores the Safavid scholar Hussein ʿAqīlī Rustamdārī's (fl. 16th century) classification of the occult sciences in his encyclopaedia *The Gardens of the Righteous* (*Riyāż al-abrār*) as a lens for understanding the author's cosmology as well as his methods for its study. Because the encyclopaedia, which Rustamdārī composed for the second Safavid Shah, Shah Tahmasp, takes as its model Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's (d. 1210) *Compendium of Knowledge* (*Jāmiʿ al-ʿulūm*), the latter serves as an important point for comparing the inclusion and arrangement of the occult sciences. Relative to Rāzī, Rustamdārī greatly expands the number of occult sciences contained in his encyclopaedia and reorganizes the ones Rāzī does include, particularly those which Rāzī placed among the mathematical and natural sciences. Rustamdārī's extensive modifications of Rāzī's system and his justifications for doing so reveal that a. the Neopythagorean principle of letters/numbers as primordial realities and building blocks of the cosmos strongly shapes his method for classifying the occult sciences and that b. Rustamdārī prioritizes the human relationship to the cosmos, especially its practical and ethical aspects, as an organizational principle over the

ontological, physical, or mathematical ones prioritized by earlier encyclopaedists. My analysis of Rustamdārī's oeuvre draws on Matt Melvin-Koushki scholarship on Jalāl al-Dīn Davānī (d. 1502) and Ibn Turkā (d. 1432) as well as that of Noah Gardiner on Aḥmad al-Būnī (d. 1225), as these were three medieval scholars whose lettrism shaped to Rustamdārī's cosmology. Scholarship on the classification of the sciences in medieval Arabic and Persian texts, especially that of Godefroid de Callatay's studies of the Brethren of Purity, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bisṭāmī (d. 1454), and others, also informs my analysis of Rustamdārī's expression of his cosmology through the classification of the occult sciences.

Wondrous Ways of Worldmaking: Magic, Marvel, and Miracle in the Miftāḥ al-sa'āda
by Ahmed Tahir Nur / Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona / tahirnur89@gmail.com
This paper explores how the Ottoman scholar Taşköprizade (d. 968/1561) situates extraordinary phenomena within a cosmological order that links the natural, mathematical, and Qur'anic sciences in the Miftāḥ al-sa'āda, showing how magic, marvels, and miracles form part of the structure of knowledge. In this multifaceted work, multiple ways of knowing are imbued with wonders and rarities (ajā'ib wa gharā'ib), occult properties (khawāṣṣ), and specialties of sainthood (walāya), thus transcending the strict categorical boundaries between the sciences. While we find magic ('ilm al-siḥr) under natural philosophy with fourteen sub-branches, from incantations ('ilm al-azā'im) to planetory invocations ('ilm da'wat al-kawākib); we see geomancy ('ilm al-raml) and omens ('ilm al-fāl) as sub-branches of astrology; and numbers in magic squares ('ilm a'dād al-wafq) as a sub-branch of mathematics. Wondrous ways of worldmaking also include such disciplines as the occult properties of the Qur'an, disposing (taṣrīf) by letters and names (ḥurūf wa-l-asmā')—specifically by the greatest name (al-ism al-a'ẓam), and comprehensive prognosticon (al-jafr wa-l-jāmi'a), associated with the family of the Prophet Muḥammad (ahl al-bayt), particularly with 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661). Moreover, prophetic miracles (mu'jizāt) and saintly marvels (karāmāt) appear in the Miftāḥ al-sa'āda as wondrous ways of producing extraordinary effects, parallel to the epistemologically distinct natural magic and its occult technologies. Taking into consideration the convergences and divergences between various wondrous ways of worldmaking in the Miftāḥ al-sa'āda, this paper seeks to (1) show how Taşköprüzade situates extraordinary phenomena under distinct epistemological categories embedded in interconnected cosmologies (2) untangle the term "occult" and document the diversity of its uses drawing on the Miftāḥ al-sa'āda, and (3) discuss the best practices of working with the disciplinary boundaries and conceptual categories such as religion, science, and magic when studying premodern scholars.

Connecting Hindu-Muslim cosmology: Creator, creation and Hindu Gods in the world of Malik Muhammad Jayasi
by Anwesha Sengupta / https://www.sylff.org/fellows/anwesha-sengupta/ / as5626@columbia.edu
When a Sufi poet writes about Hindu Gods, what place do they find in their cosmological world? Are they merely characters in a story devoid of any religious valence, or do they share meaningful space in this world? In this paper, I closely examine how the 16th century Avadhi Sufi poet represents the Creator and his creations in the prologue of three of his works - Padmāvat, Kanhāvat and Akhirī Kalām. They were all composed within ten years (1529/30-1540 CE) and each of them is on a different theme. Padmāvat is a Sufi romance narrative which is similar in structure with other Avadhi Sufi romances such as Daud's Candāyan (d. 1379) and Madhumalati (d. 1545). Kanhāvat is the story of Krishna from his birth to death. Akhirī Kalām is the narration of the day of judgement.
As is apparent, each of these texts tackles very different themes. But each of them contains a very structured and somewhat longish prologue section that talks in detail about the Creator and his creation. Comparatively, the prologue of Kanhāvat merely maintains the order of praises (to the

Creator, prophet, King, Sufi Pirs etc.). What I also take into consideration is Jāyasī's work is an exemplary example of Sufi ideas from Persian and Arabic rendered in the Avadhi language. His work also reflects much familiarity with Hindu concepts of time, roles of Gods, and other concepts such as that of "avatar".
By closely reading and comparing how Jayasi incorporates "Hindu" Gods in the narration of his poems, I argue that Jayasi creatively incorporates Hindu Gods into his works such that the overall hierarchically superior position of the Muslim Creator is preserved. This is significant, given that the plurality of Hindu ideas in his work often creates an impression of Jayasi as a "syncretic" poet.

12:45 – 13:45
Lunch Break

13:45-15:45 Janskerkhof 2/3

Room 0.13

91. Revisiting Hedayat 2: The Blind Owl - Interpretations and Translations

Chair: Saeed Talajooy, Nasrin Rahimieh

Arguably the most renowned modern Iranian writer, Sadeq Hedayat and his works, particularly his novel, The Blind Owl, have been widely studied. Nonetheless his works continue to generate debate and discussion about his contributions to modern Persian fiction and his place in world literature. 2026 marks the 90th anniversary of the publication of The Blind Owl and the 75th anniversary of Sadeq Hedayat's suicide in Paris. The three consecutive panels we propose for the Fifteenth Biennial Conference of Iranian Studies commemorate these occasions by showcasing recent and innovative scholarship on Hedayat. Bringing together established and emerging scholars, the panels examine not only Hedayat's literary works but also his drawings.
One panel will focus on visualization in Hedayat's art and fiction. The four panelists will consider Hedayat's work as painter and his visual experimentation, the covers and illustrations that accompany his works, and his use of Persian visual motifs.
A second panel will revisit The Blind Owl, its enigmatic title and the representation of abraded eyes, how surrealism might be configured in the novel, and how the dynamics of forgetting and remembrance magnify the uncanny quality of the narration. It will also analyze a new English translation of his novel and its difficult navigation between fidelity and fluency.
A third panel will focus on specific cultural contexts in (of? affecting?) Hedayat's works. The panelists will examine the question of peripheral modernity shaping his artistic forms, Hedayat's imagined India and his encounters with the Parsi community in India, his shifting nationalism, and his interests in anthropology that intersected with conceptualizations of race.

The Irrational Miracle of the Imagination: A Key to Reading the Surreal Works of Sadegh Hedayat
by Zeynab Sadeghi / University of Strasbourg / s_zeinab2002@yahoo.com
"It is certain that one of the strengths of reason lies in its ability to help us move beyond ideology and blind belief ". In the case of the quasi-surrealist Iranian author Sadegh Hedayat – whose works include The Blind Owl, Three Drops of Blood, Buried Alive and S.G.L.L (Serum gegen Liebesleidenschaft or Serum of Love's Passion) – rationality takes on a unique form. He draws the reader into a universe where the fantastic intertwines with the reality of imagination. His narratives, rational and imbued at once with the marvelous, open the door to an irrational world that serves as a refuge from the harshness of reality. This fantastic realm, marked by a supernatural dimension, escapes the frameworks of rational logic and unfolds as an "elsewhere" within the very heart of the real world.

Hedayat's irrationality is rooted in a space of dream and madness, where everyday life merges with the "nocturnal self", the double of the diurnal self—a territory dominated by intuition and the irrational.
Is Hedayat's irrational world a flight from reality, or a way of unveiling it? How does irrationality in Hedayat's works, especially in The Blind Owl and Three Drops of Blood, become a means of gaining knowledge of the inner world?

Abraded or burnt eyes in Hedâyat's fiction
by Julie Duvigneau / INALCO - PARIS / julie.duvigneau@inalco.fr
Many people have wondered about the title of Hedâyat's novel, The Blind Owl. What owl? And why blind? This article aims to reinterpret this oxymoronic image, which has already been the subject of much discussion, in the context of Hedayat's broader "vision" of sight and, in particular, the eye. Why does this writer, who was known for his sharp gaze, mistreat the organ that enables vision in his most famous novel, as well as in many of his short stories? Two particular images will our study of his poetics: "abraded" or "burnt eyes."

The Underlying Mechanism of Forgetting: A Stylistic Feature of The Blind Owl
by Ali Rahmani Ghanavizbaf / Department of Linguistics and Philology, Uppsala University, Sweden / alirahmanigh@gmail.com
This paper analyzes how the paradoxical interplay of remembrance and forgetting is dramatized not only thematically but also through the narrative structure of The Blind Owl. Instead of fulfilling the premise of retrospective narration—which presumes remembrance and recovery of past events—the text repeatedly effaces its own accounts, as if starting anew. This stylistic tendency generates an uncanny atmosphere while simultaneously foregrounding the narrator's unreliability. More importantly, it inscribes within the form of the novel the narrator's profound desire to forget. The paper illustrates how narrative style itself participates in the novel's larger meditation on memory, loss, and the cultural contradictions of modernity.

The Blind Owl in a Blind Alley of Translations: A Case Study
by Rouhollah Zarei / University of Helsinki / rouhollah.zarei@helsinki.fi
Sadeq Hedayat's The Blind Owl (Buf-e Kur, 1936) remains one of the most translated and debated works of modern Persian literature. Its dense, hallucinatory prose has challenged translators for decades, producing a spectrum of English versions that reflect shifting strategies of literary translation. Among these, D.P. Costello's 1957 translation brought Hedayat to a global audience through fluent but at times domesticating English, while Iraj Bashiri's (1974/2013) and Naveed Noori's (2011/2017) versions pursued greater literal fidelity to the Persian text, with Noori explicitly adopting a "foreignizing" approach and supplementing his translation with scholarly apparatus.
The most recent contribution, Sassan Tabatabai's Blind Owl (Penguin Classics, 2022), marks the fourth English rendering of the novel. This paper evaluates Tabatabai's translation in light of its predecessors, highlighting both its merits and shortcomings. While Tabatabai bases his work on a 1936 Bombay manuscript, his translation exhibits omissions, misreadings, and inconsistencies in cultural and idiomatic registers that affect the accuracy and resonance of Hedayat's text. Compared to Costello's still-readable fluency and Noori's attention to textual detail, Tabatabai's edition falls short in conveying Hedayat's layered modernist aesthetics and cultural allusions.
By situating Tabatabai's version within the history of The Blind Owl's English translations, this paper sheds light on broader issues in translating Persian modernism: the tension between fluency and fidelity, the transmission of cultural nuance, and the risks of rendering a canonical text for

contemporary Anglophone readerships. In doing so, it reconsiders the stakes of translation not only for the reception of Hedayat but also for the positioning of Persian literature in world literature.

Room 0.17

92. Law, Space and Subjectivity: Institutional Regulation and the Reconfiguration of Urban Space in Tehran (1850s–1940s)

Chair: Zahra Ahari, Fatemeh Tavanaei Marvi

This panel examines the role of urban institutions and legislation in shaping Tehran's transformation between the 1850s and 1940s. It argues the dual role of law both as a manifestation of modernization and a mechanism through which spatial order, public behavior, and civic identity were redefined. Under the banner of progress, Tehran's modernization involved practices of inclusion and exclusion, visibility and concealment, aimed at rendering the city more rational, hygienic, and morally aligned with "developments of the era" and its status as the "capital of the [Pahlavi] monarchy".

The first presenter argues that modern hygiene reframed domestic space as a site of public concern. She traces the shift from medical to architectural authority in defining hygienic standards for the home, showing how engineers and architects replaced physicians in defining the "healthy" house through spatial and technical norms.

The second presenter explores the modernization of Tehran's streets through a dual mode of regulation that targeted both spatial form and public behavior. She examines how the Baladiyeh's interventions and newly enacted bylaws led to the reconfiguration of urban thoroughfares and the structuring of citizen conduct in relation to hygiene, traffic order, and the organization of collective modern life. As a result, the street was transformed into a new stage for public presence—where individual visibility and behavior became subject to emerging norms of citizenship.

The third presenter examines the gendered dimensions of urban regulation. She shows how legal and moral frameworks were used to control women's visibility in public space, from the relocation of sex workers to Shahr-e No to broader restrictions on female mobility. Her analysis reveals how force operated as law in the moment, producing a spatial politics of exclusion and display.

Together, these papers highlight spatial governance as a key dimension of Tehran's modernization, showing how law, bureaucratic regulation, and moral order collectively produced the modern urban space and subject.

Baladiyeh and the Formation of the Form and Identity of Modern Urban Streets in Tehran (1920–1930)

by Fatemeh Ahmadi / Independent Scholar / fatemehahmadi13@gmail.com

Following the enactment of the Baladiyeh (Municipal) Law in 1907, the Tehran Baladiyeh emerged as a key institution of modern urban governance. The implementation of this law, particularly after the 1921 coup d'état, was accompanied by a series of urban initiatives, including the construction of public service buildings, the development of urban infrastructure, and the reorganization of streets. These measures paved the way for the creation of orderly, clean, and disciplinary streets—spaces where citizens' conduct was increasingly shaped by municipal bylaws and civic expectations.

Focusing on urban streets, this study examines the actions through which the Baladiyeh reshaped the nature of Tehran's urban spaces. Here, street space is understood not merely as a physical setting but as the product of interactions among bylaws, institutions, and citizens. The central question asks how the Baladiyeh's actions and regulations led to the reconfiguration of urban spaces and to the transformation or control of citizens' behavior—particularly in relation to hygiene, mobility, and public conduct. Using qualitative content analysis of Baladiyeh documents, this research traces the relationship between municipal laws, urban space, and citizens' behavior, and outlines how these interactions contributed to the formation of modern streets in Tehran. The findings show that Baladiyeh policies, aimed at organizing urban space and meeting citizens' daily needs, resulted in a

kind of physical and social modernization within Tehran's streets. Consequently, the city's streets were not only physically transformed but also became arenas for collective order, behavioral regulation, and the consolidation of a new civic order—one that defined the citizen's role and behavior within a shared urban life.

Architecturalizing Hygiene: The Shift from Medical to Technical Surveillance in Residential Construction in Iran(1850s–1942)

by Fatemeh Tavanaei Marvi / PhD. Student / fa.tavanaei@gmail.com

This paper examines the historical shift in Iran's domestic health governance from medical oversight to architectural surveillance between the 1850s and 1942. Recurrent epidemics of cholera and plague in the late nineteenth century catalyzed the medicalization of private life, framing hygiene as a national imperative. Early urban governance emerged through proto-bureaucratic institutions such as the Ehtesābiyeh, embedding medical discourse into urban concern. However, by the 1930s, oversight of domestic construction had become a contested domain shared between physicians and engineers. The legalization of building permits, alongside the establishment of the Technical Office of Construction—dominated by engineers—marked a turning point. With the codification of "technical hygiene" and the 1942 Tehran Building Regulation, architectural expertise displaced medical authority in defining and regulating the healthy home.

Drawing on municipal archives, regulatory texts, and press articles, and framed through a Foucauldian lens, this study traces how architecture and engineering evolved into a disciplinary regime that redefined health through spatial and technical norms. It demonstrates how this regime not only reorganized domestic space but also rearticulated health within a measurable and technocratic framework. Within this transformation, physicians were gradually pushed aside from their dominant role in urban legislation and oversight. Engineers, by consolidating their presence in municipal institutions and deploying technical instruments, assumed the authority to define and regulate the healthy home. This shift reflects a broader reconfiguration of expertise in Iran's urban modernization, where architectural rationality came to embody both spatial order and hygienic legitimacy. By examining this transition, the study contributes to scholarship on Iranian urban history, the politics of professionalization, and the spatialization of disciplinary power in the built environment.

Instituting Spatial Order: Ehtesabyeh, Baladiyeh, and the Gendered Regulation of Space in Modernising Tehran

by Sadaf Tabatabaei / Newcastle University / s.tabatabaei@newcastle.ac.uk

The establishment of the Ehtesabyeh in 1850s marked one of the first attempts to institutionalise urban order in Tehran. Conceived as part of modernisation reforms and emerging alongside a European-inspired police force, it sought to regulate markets, hygiene, and morality, and to impose a visible presence of state authority in the streets and everyday spaces of the city. Its remit was wide and often improvised, including policing behaviour, controlling the market, expelling "undesirable" groups, and enforcing ad-hoc decrees. By the reign of Mozaffar al-Din Shah, this authority was nominally transferred to the first Baladiyeh, though it remained little more than a name and a building rather than an institution experienced by citizens. It was only in the early twentieth century, with the emergence of the second Baladiyeh in 1921, that institutional power began to extend through municipal codes, licensing, and spatial regulations. Supported by the police, these institutions reveal how Tehran's modernisation relied on new mechanisms of control that sought to render both the city and its citizens legible and governable.

One key intervention was the expulsion of sex workers at the turn of the century, when Ehtesabyeh and Baladiyeh officials displaced women deemed disorderly from central Tehran under the banners

of health and morality, creating law at the moment of enforcement. This culminated in the 1922 relocation of sex workers to Shahr-e No, marking the first traces of what became Tehran's red-light district, where policing reinforced municipal authority.Alongside these acts, gender control was also extended to public and entertainment spaces in the transforming city, spaces increasingly open to wandering yet closely monitored to limit women's visibility and movement. By tracing the emergence and transformation of these institutions, the paper argues that Tehran's modernisation must also be understood through the regulatory practices that defined who could be visible, included, or pushed to the margins of the modern city. These practices shaped both the material body of the city and the lived experiences of its inhabitants, revealing how the making of modern Tehran was inseparable from the control of women's mobility and visibility.

Room 0.19

93. Teaching Persian in a Changing World Order: Language Education, Cultural Understanding, and Strategic Role of Language

Chair: Dr. Nahal Akbari

This panel explores how Persian language education adapts to the shifting global landscape through innovation, advocacy, and the use of emerging technologies. Persian has long been recognized as a language of strategic and cultural importance, yet recent geopolitical changes, funding reductions, and technological disruption have redefined what it means to teach and sustain less commonly taught languages in higher education.

The first paper situates Persian within broader discussions of language policy and cultural diplomacy, proposing immersive technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Virtual Reality (VR) as tools for experiential learning that bridge intercultural understanding and professional preparedness. The second paper examine how technology and multi-modal pedagogy transform classroom practices, strengthen linguistic proficiency, and foster meaningful cultural engagement among diverse learners. The final paper addresses advocacy and institutional sustainability, analyzing challenges such as reduced federal support and offering strategies for maintaining Persian programs through curricular flexibility, technology integration, and community partnerships.

Together, these studies show how policy awareness, technological innovation, and pedagogical creativity intersect to ensure the resilience and continued relevance of Persian language education in a changing world order.

Revolution and Violence: Iran, Russia, and the Afterlives of Revolutionary Power
Touraj Atabaki

Persian as a Strategic Language in the Age of Immersive Technology: Building Cultural Diplomacy and Educational Resilience
by Peyman Nojoumian / University of Southern California / nojoumia@usc.edu

In a rapidly changing global order, foreign language education plays a vital role in fostering intercultural understanding, professional preparedness, and international collaboration. Persian, designated as a critical language through the National Defense Education Act (1958) and the Boren National Security Education Act (1991), remains essential to the United States' engagement with the Persian-speaking world. Yet, despite decades of recognition, Persian instruction has only recently begun to integrate technological innovations that can transform traditional teaching into experiential, globally oriented learning.

This paper explores how emerging tools such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Virtual Reality (VR) can be used to simulate authentic linguistic and cultural experiences for learners of Persian. Immersive VR environments, for example, can recreate diplomatic and social interactions in Tehran, museum visits in Isfahan, or academic exchanges in Dushanbe—allowing learners to navigate culturally rich, task-based scenarios that would otherwise be inaccessible. When paired with AI-driven feedback and

adaptive analytics, such environments cultivate communicative competence, cultural literacy, and critical thinking while connecting language learning to professional and diplomatic contexts. Drawing on the frameworks of task-based learning and intercultural communication, this study argues that immersive technologies can build both linguistic proficiency and educational resilience. Integrating AI and VR into Persian instruction supports cultural diplomacy, enhances learner engagement, and ensures that Persian education remains relevant, adaptive, and globally connected in a changing world order.

Sustaining Persian Language Programs: Addressing Students' Needs, Advocacy and Institutional Challenges

by Anousha Sedighi / Portland State University / sedighi@pdx.edu

This first part of this paper discusses the profile of Persian language learners in the U.S. and explores the characteristics of second language learners and heritage learners by focusing on their motivation for learning Persian and the outcomes it has for student retention in Persian language classes. By examining students' needs, we can learn how to address these needs better in order to focus on their career readiness and combat student retention. The results of this paper indicate that while students show a strong desire for the development and maintenance of their Persian language, they report a variety of reasons that hinder their efforts towards this goal.

The second part of the paper focuses on the timely issue of the state of teaching Persian and the sustainability of Persian programs as institutions face major budget cuts during the current administration. The paper draws on previous work, including the AATP roundtable organized during the 2016 AIS conference, as well as the advocacy efforts of organizations such as ACTFL, LSA, and NCOLTCL. This paper provides concrete suggestions for Persian language programs by providing a variety of strategies such as shifting the curriculum and use of technology. The paper also aims to raise awareness about the advocacy needs at many levels: at the university level, among colleagues in Iranian Studies, and also for the philanthropic community foundations that provide funds for Persian programs and can have a stronger voice when dealing with the university administration in order to help to sustain the Persian language programs.

Reimagining Persian Language Teaching: Technology, Multimodal Pedagogy, and Cultural Engagement in a Changing World

by Neda Sahranavard / UC Irvine / nsahrana@uci.edu

Vocabulary and grammar instruction, translation, and the use of literary texts for close reading are widely used in Persian language instruction (Abasi, 2012; Alizadeh et al., 2016; Talajooy, 2025). While these approaches are culturally and linguistically rich, they often emphasize form over communicative function and may not fully meet the needs of diverse learners seeking practical, engaging, and technology-enhanced language learning experiences.

This presentation reports on a qualitative study conducted in an asynchronous, university-level introductory Persian course offered in 2025, reimagining traditional instruction through task-based, multimodal, and learner-centered approaches. Drawing on research highlighting the implementation of digital, multimodal resources and innovative pedagogy (Lin, 2012; Ting, 2014; Tan, 2023; Fedorenko et al., 2021; Tan & Matsuda, 2020; Ho & Feng, 2024), the course integrated Padlet, social media platforms, and AI tools to foster creativity, collaboration, and linguistic growth, utalizing students' digital literacy to cultivate lifelong learners.

Students completed weekly theme-based assignments that connected their personal stories to Persian cultural topics, including online research, interviews with cultural informants, multimodal journals, and collaborative infographic-style projects. AI tools provided real-time feedback, supporting individualized learning and learner autonomy. Analysis of student work and reflections

showed that learners valued authentic cultural engagement, collaboration, and the multimodal design of the course, which fostered deeper cultural awareness and a stronger sense of belonging in the asynchronous classroom.
The session will present course design, research rationale, and outcomes, highlighting examples of student work such as including multimodal journals, theme-based tasks, Padlet collaboration, and AI integration. Participants will have practical, innovative approaches for creating engaging, inclusive, and technology-enhanced Persian language learning environments.

Room 0.21

94. Past and Present: Revisiting the 1979 Iranian Revolution through the Lens of Iran's Current Sociopolitical Dynamics

Chair: Shahab Daneshvar

Over the past decades, Iranian society has undergone profound cultural transformations that have reshaped its social fabric and collective sensibilities. Comprehensive surveys and ethnographic studies reveal a decisive turn toward individualism, gender equality, and secular orientations—values that stand in stark contrast to the normative framework promoted by the Islamic Republic. This widening gap between societal values and state ideology has generated a mounting sense of dissonance within the political order. Politically, the Islamic Republic appears increasingly incapable of articulating a persuasive vision of the future to its citizenry and has, as a result, been steadily losing its hegemonic grip. In sum, Iran stands poised on the brink of sweeping change.
Yet this is not the first time in Iran's modern history that the prospect of transformation has loomed so large. The nation has, within living memory, undergone a revolutionary upheaval of comparable magnitude in 1979—an event whose reverberations continue to shape its political and cultural landscape. It is with an awareness of these continuities and disjunctions that the scholars convening on this panel propose to revisit the Revolution of 1979, situating it within the broader context of Iran's present transformations.

Islam and Socialism in Global Perspective: The Tudeh Party of Iran and the Politics of Alliance in Iran 1979 Revolution

by Shahab Daneshvar / Leiden university / mazdakprometeh@yahoo.com

Viewed from the perspective of the present, the relationship between the Tudeh Party of Iran and the Islamist forces supportive of Ayatollah Khomeini—the role it played in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution 1979, and its subsequent endorsement of the radical faction of the Islamic Republic—appears almost inconceivable. How a Marxist-Leninist, Pro-Soviet party, most of whose leaders were at best non-religious, came to support a theocratic system is often addressed through overly superficial interpretations. In the official pre-revolutionary discourse of the Pahlavi regime, cooperation between Marxists and Islamists was routinely dismissed as a "The Reactionary Red–Black Alliance", a phrase whose resonance continues to echo in contemporary discussions.
Yet across the two principal arenas of global transformation in the 1970s—Latin America, and the Middle East and North Africa—collaboration between not only religious activists but also organizations pursuing explicitly "religious politics" and Marxist groups was far from unusual. In Latin America, Marxists frequently viewed liberation theology and radical clergy as effective allies in forming "people's fronts," and in the Middle East and North Africa the notion of "reconciling Islam and socialism" gained considerable traction.
This study draws on newly uncovered archival materials, in-depth interviews, and recently published memoirs to examine this relationship in both global and local contexts. It seeks to explain how, and through what processes, the Tudeh Party of Iran—once a leading advocate of the ideals of the Constitutional Revolution—abandoned cooperation with nationalist-secular forces and gravitated toward the pro-Khomeini camp.

The Inescapable Violence of Revolution? Iran 1979 and Beyond

by Touraj Atabaki / International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam and Leiden University. / tat@iisg.nl

The twentieth century opened and closed with two momentous upheavals: the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Both promised renewals, yet each became indelibly marked by the violence through which revolution was enacted and sustained. This paper sets these revolutions in comparative perspective, tracing how violence persisted not only in their founding moments but also in the years that followed.

In Russia, the October Revolution framed violence as a necessary rupture, a decisive means to dismantle the old order and to forge a new one. The Civil War of 1918-1921 normalised coercion through executions, requisitions, and summary justice, embedding practices of compulsion into daily life. Under Stalin, this "grammar of violence" was further institutionalised: punishment, denunciation, and surveillance were no longer exceptional but became routine mechanisms of governance. They penetrated local administrations, workplaces, schools, and even private households, turning repression into a defining feature of Soviet modernity.

By the mid-twentieth century, violence in Russia had thus shifted from a revolutionary rupture to a routinised system of governance. Six decades later, the Iranian Revolution of 1979 erupted with its own promises of emancipation and justice yet unfolded under the long shadow of earlier revolutionary trajectories. The overthrow of the monarchy quickly gave way to revolutionary tribunals, purges, and militant mobilisation that echoed familiar repertoires of coercion. With the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War and the consolidation of power in the 1980s, violence deepened further: mass arrests, political executions, and the silencing of dissent transformed families and communities, reshaping collective memory and embedding fear into everyday life.

By juxtaposing these two cases, this paper argues that revolutionary violence cannot be confined to a moment of rupture. Rather, it extends into the afterlives of revolution, where institutions, households, and memory sustain and reproduce its force. The question thus persists: is violence an avoidable excess of revolution, or its very grammar?

Islamic Socialists and Secular Marxists: Relationship and interplay on the Eve of Iran's 1979 Revolution

by Alirez Behtoui / political sociology / alireza.behtoui@sh.se

In the 1970s, following the imprisonment and suppression of Iran's reformist opposition movements—Nehzat-e Azadi (Freedom Movement of Iran) and the Sāzmān-e Sosiālist-hā-ye Nehzāt-e Melli (Socialist Organization of the National Movement)—two radical successors emerged: the Mojahedin-e Khalq and the Fedayeen-e Khalq. The former articulated an Islamist-socialist synthesis, while the latter embodied a distinctly secular Marxist orientation.

This study investigates how the interplay between these two branches of the Iranian left shaped the broader relationship between religious and secular revolutionary forces on the eve of, and in the immediate aftermath of, the 1979 Revolution. It further explores how wider contextual factors—including international developments, Cold War realignments such as the Saur Revolution in Afghanistan, and interactions with domestic political actors, particularly those surrounding Ayatollah Khomeini—conditioned the evolution of this relationship.

Drawing on a historical analysis of political documents, ideological texts, and secondary literature, complemented by interviews with former activists from both the Islamic socialist and secular Marxist traditions, the research illuminates the intellectual, strategic, and affective dimensions of both cooperation and contention between these two wings of Iran's revolutionary left. It concludes by

tracing the divergent trajectories of these movements as the Islamic Republic consolidated power under Ayatollah Khomeini's leadership.

Leftist intellectuals and the concept of democracy in the 1979 Revolution

by Saeed Paivandi / Sociology of Education / Sociology of Social Movement / saeed.paivandi@univ-lorraine.fr

Freedom was one of the main slogans heard on the streets during the revolutionary period of 1978-1979. However, the Iranian spring of freedom was very short and mortal after the fall of the Pahlavi regime and the victory of the revolutionaries in February 1979, and the government established after the revolution gradually began to restrict political freedoms, so that only three years after the 1979 revolution, Iran witnessed the return of autocratic policies in the form of a nascent theocratic system. The question raised in this article is what was the understanding and perception of the concept of freedom by the various political forces in Iran at that time, and what possible relationship did the fate of democracy in post-revolutionary Iran have with such an understanding?

To answer this question, one possible approach is to critically examine the perceptions and perceptions of leftist elites and intellectuals who played an active role in the Iranian political scene in the 1970s. From a methodological perspective, secular leftist intellectuals and elites have been comparatively examined in two large groups:

The first group is the main and influential writings of the 1990s among the radical left. The two main trends in this comparative study include the Tudeh Party of Iran as a historical force that has been present in the Iranian political scene since 1941, and the Organization of Iranian People's Fedai Guerrillas as a young and emerging force in the Iranian public arena.

The second group includes social democratic tendencies, which mostly include the continuation of Khalil Maleki's "Third Force" movement.

In this comparative study, concepts such as revolution, reform, parliamentary system, or the definition of the concept of freedom or democracy are considered as the main inputs to the analysis grid.

Room 0.22

95. Texts of Dominion, Acts of Dissent: Iranian Gender Politics from Andarz to Instagram

Chair: Mostafa Abedinifard

This panel traces a genealogy of gendered contestation in Iran by examining how power, dissent, and complicity are inscribed and contested across changing mediums—from the written page of the Qajar court to the digital screen of the twenty-first century. Each paper interrogates a distinct "text" through which Iranian gender politics have been negotiated: literary, legal, somatic, and digital. Together they reveal that the history of Iranian feminism is not a linear narrative of resistance, but a complex archive of argument, appropriation, and embodied risk.

The panel opens with "Advice on Trial: Bibi Khanom Astarabadi and the Forensic Turn in Late Qajar Andarz," which reconstructs a forgotten prose genealogy of feminist critique. It shows how Astarabadi and her predecessors transformed prescriptive advice manuals into dialogic courts of inquiry—putting male virtue, guardianship, and justice on trial—and thus inaugurating a forensic mode of dissent within Persian prose.

The second paper, "Women Who Own Women: African Slavery and the Legacies of Iranian Feminism," complicates this narrative of resistance by exposing its foundations in racialized domestic hierarchies. Examining Qajar aqdnamah (marriage contracts) and mihriyah provisions, it uncovers how elite Muslim women's property rights could coexist with their ownership of enslaved African women, revealing complicity as a constitutive feature of Iranian gender modernity.

Bringing the genealogy into the present, "My Act Belongs to Me and You: Rethinking Body Performance in the Context of Oppression," analyzes acts of bodily defiance—public undressing or

unveiling—as performative speech acts. Drawing on Foucault and Butler, it argues that such embodied gestures weaponize vulnerability, transforming the disciplined body into a text of political authorship and collective resistance.
Finally, "Digital Activism and Women's Rights: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Woman, Life, Freedom Movement," examines the Instagram-based discourse of Iranian activists and celebrities. It traces how digital media reconfigures older forms of testimony and witnessing into networked, algorithmic acts of solidarity.
Across these case studies, the panel reveals how Iranian women have continually rewritten the scripts of gender and power—from parchment to pixels—turning each new medium into a contested archive of both dissent and complicity.

Advice on Trial: Bibi Khanom Astarabadi and the Forensic Turn in Late Qajar Andarz
by Mostafa Abedinifard / University of British Columbia / mostafa.abedinifard@ubc.ca
Farzaneh Milani's foundational scholarship offers a powerful genealogy of Iranian women's literary dissent, tracing a line of descent from the prophetic, mid-nineteenth-century rebellion of Tahereh Qurrat al'Ayn to the modernists of the twentieth century. My research contributes to this genealogy by excavating a forgotten but pivotal scene of emergence: a "forensic turn" in late Qajar prose, where women and their allies put the patriarchal "written order" on trial. This counter-discourse arose from a direct, text-to-text quarrel with a wave of misogynistic prescriptive manuals that circulated during 1870s–90s, most notably the Ta'dib al-Nesvān cluster (The Disciplining of Women). This paper argues that this polemical response unfolded through a radical act of genre seizure. It began in verse with the male ally Amir Aslān's Ādāb-e Mardi (Etiquette of Manliness, 1882), intensified in the anonymous prose of Ta'dib al-Rejāl (The Disciplining of Men, ca. 1888), and culminated in Bibi Khānom Astarābādi's masterpiece, Maʿāyeb al-Rejāl (The Vices of Men, 1894). These authors transformed the monologic andarz (advice) tradition into a dialogic court of inquiry. Their method was forensic: they converted abstract precepts into evidentiary tests, making lived, household realities the measure of male virtue and initiating a powerful shift from being objects of counsel to subjects of judgment.
Focusing on Bibi Khānom's treatise, I demonstrate how she places the core tenets of male authority—"guardianship," "justice," and "gheyrat" ("gendered zeal; protective masculine honor/jealousy")—directly on trial, using her own signed, autobiographical testimony as the final verdict. This forgotten line of descent constitutes an overlooked bridge in the genealogy of Iranian feminism, establishing a prose-based prehistory for the discursive mobility Milani describes. It reveals a sophisticated tradition where dissent was not just voiced, but methodically argued and judged, long before the modernists of the twentieth century.

Women who own women: African slavery and legacies of Iranian feminism
by Wendy DeSouza / University of California, Berkeley / wndesouza@gmail.com
The abject position of enslaved African women in Iran compared with free Muslim women calls for intersectional feminist approaches that investigate social hierarchies under slavery, including shifting ideas of patriarchy and gender among women of different labor classes. This paper will explore the marriage contract (aqdnamah) and especially the groom's financial promise to the bride (mihriyah) as a way of complicating social hierarchies within the Qajar household. Studying the imbrications of race, class and gender in the lives of women helps us reconstruct the devastating ways that African women's commodified bodies and sexual labor became a fixture of elite domestic life, despite silences in contemporary histories of Iranian feminism.

My Act Belongs to Me and You: Rethinking Body Performance in the Context of Oppression

by Morteza Farhadytooli / University of Cyprus / farhadytooli.morteza@ucy.ac.cy
Being stripped or uncovered, especially in public spaces, has historically been considered an act of disgrace and prohibition. Public bodily acts are expected to conform to norms and codes imposed by the state and dominant culture, representing the biopolitical production of docile bodies (Foucault, 1995; Foucault, 1978). The subversive uptake of the idea of docility in recent decades, where individuals transform their obedient bodies into political weapons, challenges the discourse of body politics and oppression.
This paper examines how Iranian women weaponize their bodies in their most vulnerable, private form such as being naked or without hijab, to disrupt state-enforced modesty and enter public discourse. By analyzing cases of Iranian women we argue that these sorts of acts challenge the state's symbolic ideology precisely because they exploit the body's dual status: as a site of individual agency and a collective symbol of resistance. These acts, though punished as criminal or mad, become iterable gestures that transcend their immediate context, inviting broader participation in dissent.
In regimes where the state polices women's bodies as sites of political control, removing the hijab or one's other clothes becomes a radical act of double resistance. It breaks and protests rules of modesty while thrusting the body into public discourse. While other studies have examined naked protest as a global phenomenon (Cavaillé, 2021; Souweine, 2005), this paper argue that in the Middle Eastern context and, particularly, in Iran such acts effectively use the tension between the body's vulnerability and its political iterability.
By considering the Judith Butler's theory of performativity and building on Michel Foucault's concept of biopower, we analyze how the removal of the hijab or nakedness transform the body into a citable text of resistance, one that belongs to the women yet has effects beyond their site of resistance, and beyond their control.

Digital Activism and Women's Rights: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Social Movements in Iran
by Rahil Golgiri / University of Vienna / strangegirls2005@yahoo.com
This research focuses on the discourse around the Zan Zendegi Azadi (Woman, Life, Freedom) movement in Iran with particular emphasis on digital activism and women's rights advocacy on Instagram. Within the perimeters of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), This work looks into how Iranian people such as public figures, and activists manage intersections of gender constellations and aid the advocacy for women's rights in the context of Iran's socio-political environment. The discourse of 15 Instagram posts as a corpus from actors, footballers and activist's turns into the application of nationalism CDA sociology frameworks. On the micro-level, posts summon sentiment, storytelling, and imagery to express support and urgency, frequently using emotive hashtags, like #ZanZendegiAzadi, to unify the multifaceted movement. At the meso-level, focus is directed to digital participation that has high measuring units of engagement (likes, comments, shares) in which speakers are celebrities, illustrating the responsiveness to the movement and highlighting the celebrities' effectiveness to transmit the message of the movement. It situates within Iran's macro socio-political context for analysis, that demonstrates the movement's ability to counteract patriarchal and state domination while mobilizing international support. The results of this study demonstrate that digital activism has the ability to shift power paradigms of gender and woman's rights in Iran and shed light on the impact of discourse, power, and social change in Iran.

Room 1.09

96. The Legacy of the Sasanian Empire in Contemporary Iran Through the Perspectives of Language, Art, and Culture

Chair: Pouran Lashini

The civilizations of antiquity played a crucial role in shaping the artistic and cultural milieu of the Sasanian Empire (224–651 CE). Ruled by the Middle Persian (Pahlavi) Dynasty and founded upon the

religious framework of Zoroastrianism, the Sasanian state exercised political and cultural authority across much of the Near East. Its legacy is evident in diverse domains, including language, jurisprudence, visual and architectural arts, and ritual practices. As a dominant imperial power, the Sasanians profoundly influenced the region's cultural identity. In the aftermath of the Islamic conquest, numerous elements of Sasanian tradition were assimilated into the fabric of Islamic civilization, producing a hybrid cultural heritage whose impact endures across the Middle East to this day.
This panel investigates the lasting legacy of the Sasanian Empire, with a particular focus on its manifestations in contemporary Iran. Presenters will explore this legacy through four interrelated lenses: linguistic transmission, historical memory, religious and ritual continuity, and the visual arts.

Echoes of Divine Water in Aesthetic Symbolism From Sassanian Era to Pre-Modern Art
by Pouran Lashini / UTD / plashini313@yahoo.com
This paper focuses on the ritual legacy of Zoroastrianism's principal act of worship, the Yasna. The Yasna included a key ritual called the āb-zōhr ("offering of water"), which involved reciting sacred texts into water (zaur) for protection, thereby imbuing the water with a sense of heavenly presence. The communal spirit of Shia ideology has evolved from the concept of sacred water in Persian mythology to religious ideology. The exposure to holy water contained in a saqqa-khaneh invites a connection to Āshūrā and the martyr Abbas ibn Ali in his heroic role as a water bearer. Saqqa-khanehs were constructed as devotional shrines to Abbas, embodying his heritage and providing a means of mental and spiritual renewal through the act of āb-zōhr.
Keys: Divine Water, Yasna, Zaur, Ashura Ritual, Saqqa khanehs

Sassanian Artistic Heritage in the Visual Arts of Iran, Case Study: The Use of Symbolic Motifs of the Sassanian Era in Contemporary Iranian Graphic Design
by Farzaneh Farrokhfar / Tarbiat Modares University / f.farrokhfar@modares.ac.ir
A review on the artworks of the Sasanian era shows the wide use of symbolic motifs that have been used in various artistic productions of architecture, metalwork, pottery, textiles, etc. These symbols, which are displayed in a variety of plant, animal, geometric or composite motifs, in addition to observing aesthetic principles, contain deep messages and concepts that add to the importance of these motifs. The use of these symbolic motifs in artworks of the Islamic era not only did not stop, but often continued with the same concepts and sometimes with slight changes and harmonization of its content with the beliefs of the new religion. This issue indicates the awareness of Iranian artists and craftsmen in recognizing the original symbols of this land and adhering to their use in artistic productions. The efforts of the community of artists and artisans to preserve the national identity of Iranians throughout different eras, from the Sasanian era to the present, are commendable because this effort has led to the use of symbolic motifs from the pre-Islamic era continuing into the contemporary era and being used in a variety of visual arts works, including graphic design. The focus of this research is on works that have made it to the national events in Iranian graphic design, in order to identify the extent to which contemporary Iranian artists have adopted the symbolic motifs of the Sasanian era and their concepts while reading these works. To this end, the main goal of this article is to identify the use of pre-Islamic symbolic motifs in Iranian graphic design works in the most important national events of the last 4 decades (from 1985 to 2025). The results of the research indicate the widespread use of symbolic motifs from the Sasanian era in a variety of graphic design artworks, including sign and poster design, which have often been used by the most prominent artists while preserving their original concepts.

The Sasanian Legacy in Post-Islamic Persian Literature: Cultural Continuities and the Reinvention of Iranian Identity
Seyedeh Fatemeh Hosseini Mighan

The Role of Mediators in the Linguistic Transmission of the Sasanian Legacy
by Neda Sharifi Oroumi / Tenured lecturer in Persian language and culture at the University of Lille, France / nedasharifi8463@gmail.com
The transition from Middle Persian (Pahlavi) to New Persian (Dari) represents a remarkable instance of linguistic resilience and cultural continuity across the profound political and religious transformations that followed the fall of the Sasanian Empire (224–651 CE). As the imperial and ecclesiastical language of late antique Iran, Pahlavi functioned as the vehicle of administration, historiography, and Zoroastrian theology, written in a script combining Iranian phonetics with Aramaic logograms. The Arab-Muslim conquest introduced Arabic as the dominant medium of governance, scholarship, and religion, leading to the decline of Pahlavi as a written language. Yet Persian endured through oral traditions, private teaching, and Zoroastrian religious practice, ensuring the survival of its structural and lexical core.
This paper investigates how New Persian re-emerged in the 9th–10th centuries—not as an abrupt linguistic creation but as the product of continuous mediation by diverse cultural agents. Political administrators maintained bilingual practices in local governance; poets and court patrons fostered a Persian literary revival; scribes and translators adapted pre-Islamic concepts into Arabic and Persian prose; and Zoroastrian priests preserved theological and ethical lexicon within their traditions. Through their combined efforts, these mediators transmitted the linguistic and symbolic legacy of Sasanian Iran into the new Islamic context.
By foregrounding their roles, this study argues that the continuity between Pahlavi and New Persian was not merely linguistic but ideological and aesthetic—a deliberate reconfiguration of memory and identity that transformed Persian into both a language of cultural endurance and a medium of historical self-renewal.

Room 1.10

97. State, Society and Religion under Reza Shah

Chair: Anna Heller, Elyas Pirasteh

Nearly one hundred years ago, Reza Shah abolished the Qajar Dynasty and established the Pahlavi Dynasty. During his sixteen-year reign, Iran was transformed socially, politically, economically and culturally, to such an extent that Reza Shah is frequently referred to as the founder of modern Iran. Much important historical work has been done, particularly in the past twenty-five years, to enrich our understanding of this vital period of Iranian history; furthering important debates about the successes and failures of the early Pahlavi modernisation project. This work remains important today, as more archival material becomes available and new generations of historians emerge, utilising innovative historiographical methods.
This panel brings together scholars from different historical disciplines to explore little-studied aspects of the state, society and religion of the Reza Shah period. Each of the works draw on previously inaccessible or understudied archival material to give fresh perspectives on the history and historiography of the era. The first examines the spread of Protestantism in the 1920s and 30s, exploring the broader societal and cultural changes that prompted such a high number of conversions in that period. The second paper analyses the myriad factors that influenced the state's treatment of the Bahai community during the Reza Shah period. The third paper looks at the development of the police force during the early Pahlavi period through the journal Nāmeh-ye Shahrbāni, exploring aspects of the institutionalisation of the security apparatus of the state and how state propaganda sought to present a more positive image of the police to the population. The final

presentation offers new perspectives on Reza Shah's economic and foreign policy through analysis of Iranian attempts to open a commercial route towards the Mediterranean Sea.

Reading Order: Police, Pedagogy, and Ideology in Reza Shah's Iran

by Elyas Pirasteh / https://www.uni-marburg.de/en/staff-info?dn=vzobixb0vs / elyas.pirasteh@uni-marburg.de

First published in 1935, the monthly Nāmeh-ye Shahrbāni (Police Gazette) marked the beginning of a long-lived institutional journal that continued until the end of the Pahlavi era. Modeled on specialized police magazines from Europe and the United States, it combined translated materials with local reports and essays on policing, technology, and civic responsibility. During Reza Shah's reign, the journal was not merely an administrative tool—it served as a form of in-service education that aimed to modernize the police force, updating officers on innovations in their profession while introducing them to a new vocabulary of order and discipline. At the same time, it actively promoted the ruling ideology, presenting government policies as symbols of progress and guiding police personnel to align with the state's vision of modernization and social control.

This presentation explores how Nāmeh-ye Shahrbāni helped shape a new professional and moral identity for Iranian policemen, blending instruction with ideological persuasion. Articles on law enforcement, hygiene, and national progress coexisted with moral advice and celebrations of state achievements, gradually transforming a technical bulletin into a medium of state pedagogy. By tracing this shift, the study argues that the journal functioned as both an educational and ideological project—training the body of the police while schooling their minds in the ethos of obedience and progress. Through its words and images, Nāmeh-ye Shahrbāni offers a window into how modern statehood was taught, internalized, and imagined within the ranks of Iran's police during Reza Shah's drive for order and modernity. Initially circulated only among police staff, the journal was later made available by subscription to external readers, including students and women, extending its pedagogical and ideological reach beyond the institution itself.

From Justice to Repression: Reza Shah's Shifting Treatment of the Baha'is of Iran

by Mina Yazdani / Eastern Kentucky University / mina.yazdani@eku.edu

In 1927, Mirza Haydar Ali Uskui (d. 1951), in his "History of the [Baha'i] Faith in Azerbaijan," praised Reza Shah Pahlavi (r. 1926–1941) as the first ruler in eighty years to punish the murderer of a Baha'i—an unprecedented act that has not been repeated since. Yet, even in that same year, other perpetrators of Baha'i killings escaped arrest and punishment. Within a few years, moreover, the state began to impose restrictions on the community, including the closure of Baha'i schools, imprisonment of Baha'is for conducting marriages according to their faith, dismissal of Baha'is from government service, and the dissolution of Baha'i institutions.

Reza Shah's treatment of Iranian Baha'is cannot be reduced to a single pattern. The early years of his reign were marked by inconsistency and contradiction, followed by a period of relative tolerance, and, after 1932, by systematic repression and the institutionalization of anti-Baha'i measures. A constant feature across all phases was the prohibition on the circulation of Baha'i literature. Drawing on government archives, consular correspondence, communications from Iranian and international Baha'i institutions, memoirs, local histories, unpublished manuscripts, and contemporary newspapers, this paper offers a periodization of Reza Shah's treatment of the Baha'i community. It argues that these shifting attitudes reflected three interrelated factors: the balance of power between the Shah and the Shi'i clergy; his project of national homogenization and centralized loyalty; and the evolving nature of his regime. Finally, the paper highlights the overlooked role of Azali statesmen close to the Shah, suggesting that their longstanding hostility toward the Baha'is shaped aspects of state policy. More broadly, this study demonstrates that an in-depth analysis of

the government's treatment of the Baha'is in twentieth-century Iran is an indispensable component of understanding the evolving dynamics between the state and the ulama.

Faith, Faithfulness, and Loyalty: The Formation of Iranian Protestantism during the Reign of Reza Pahlavi

by Marcin Rzepka / Jagiellonian University in Krakow / marcin.rzepka@uj.edu.pl

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the emergence of the Iranian Protestantism during the reign of Reza Pahlavi, situating it within the broader context of sociopolitical and cultural transformations in early twentieth-century Iran. The reforms implemented under Reza Pahlavi, together with the consolidation of Iranian nationalism, brought about significant changes in both social and religious life. Within this framework, the study examines the establishment and development of Protestant communities in Iran.

Protestantism in Iran was initially linked to the activities of foreign missionaries, primarily British and American. However, during the 1920s and 1930s, their activities—mostly educational and social in nature—became increasingly restricted, which allowed local workers to assume a more prominent role. This paper argues that the noticeable rise in the number of Iranian adherents to Protestant churches reflects processes of religious conversion that must be understood in relation to broader patterns of identity formation and cultural negotiation.

The analysis of the Iranian Protestant communities at that period contributes to a deeper understanding of self-categorization strategies within Iranian society, the reconfiguration of the religious field, and the broader question of re-imagining the Self amid conditions of rapid social and cultural change. By applying a contextual and processual approach and drawing on archival missionary materials, this research seeks to assess the extent to which Iranian cultural values were preserved by Protestant converts and to identify the mechanisms through which religious conversion facilitated the reconstruction of both individual and collective identities.

The Ravanduz Route: The failed attempt of the opening of a commercial road from Tabriz to Mediterranean Sea (1923-1939).

by Thomas Bedrede / Sorbonne Nouvelle / tbedrede@gmail.com

In 1923, André Hesse, a French professor of law in Tehran, alerted the High Commission in charge of the French mandate in Syria: the Iranians wanted to free themselves from British and Soviet control over their economy, and France, by promoting the opening of a trade route to Syria, could fulfill this wish. While the road between Baghdad and Damascus was being developed (Jacquier), the Iranians, French, and Iraqis were planning to open another route: a road that would link Tabriz to the Syrian Lebanese coast via Ravanduz and Mosul. Despite the shared ambitions of Iran and France, whose goal since the 1920s had been to make Syria a land of commercial transit, the French ambassador to Iraq explained in 1939 that this road was no longer in use.

This presentation, which contributes to the economic history of Iran, the study of its international relations, and that of the "regimes of mobilities" in interwar Middle East (Tejel and Öztan), highlights the efforts made by successive Iranian governments to develop this new trade route and aims to understand the reasons for its failure. Drawing on a variety of sources (memoirs and writings of Iranian statesmen, the Iranian press, foreign diplomatic and military correspondence, and the Franco-Persian Chamber of Commerce of Paris Bulletin), this presentation argues that difficult relations with neighboring Iraq, the construction of the Iranian rail network along a north-south axis, and the development of ports in the Persian Gulf ultimately defeated the Ravanduz route.

Room 1.11

98. The 1979 Revolution: Historical Contingencies, Unrealized Possibilities, and Imagined Futures

Chair: Kevan Harris, Peyman Jafari

Revolutions are deeply entwined with the narratives participants construct about the past, present, and future as they mobilize, persevere, and seek to overthrow regimes. These stories evolve over time, refracted through shifting circumstances, worldviews, emotions, and the disappointments that follow unforeseen outcomes, including the rise of new forms of domination. Scholarly narratives about revolutions likewise change, shaped both by retrospective readings of the past through the lens of the present and by the incorporation of new sources and comparative insights.
Reflecing these dynamics, the scholarship on the Iranian Revolution faces two central challenges. First, instrumentalist interpretations, propagated by the state to legitimize its existence and by segments of its opposition to de-legitimize it, have converged in producing nostalgic depictions of pre-revolutionary conditions. Second, the tendency to read the revolution backward from contemporary outcomes has generated teleological accounts in both academic and public debates. This panel seeks to move beyond nostalgic and teleological framings by recovering the contingencies, imaginations, and possibilities that animated the revolution's political rivalries, social and cultural experiments, and the formal and informal spaces of debate and action. Each paper examines a distinct arena in which the revolution unfolded through contingent interactions among political and social actors. Paper 1 investigates political maneuvering at the intersection of domestic and foreign power structures. Paper 2 offers a micro-level study of elite interactions and rivalries surrounding the formation of the Revolutionary Council. Paper 3 analyzes the grassroots movement of Turkmen peasants and the creation of the Turkmen Council. Paper 4 explores the impact of labor strikes on the establishment of new political institutions and the emergence of showras (councils) in the workplace.
Together, these contributions illuminate the revolution not as a predetermined trajectory but as a contested process shaped by competing visions and unfulfilled possibilities.

The Strength of Weak Organizations: How Radicals Captured the State in 1979 Iran
by Maryam Alemzadeh / University of Oxford / maryam.alemzadeh@area.ox.ac.uk
Why do the radicals, commonly lacking organizational and political experience, tend to capture the state successfully after major revolutions? To propose a possible explanation, this paper engages in a micro-level study of elite interactions in post-revolutionary Iran. Shortly after the February 1979 revolution, the least organized group of activists, retrospectively known as the Islamists, emerged as victors of the postrevolutionary powerplay. I study this group of revolutionary elite's day-to-day concerns, decision-making processes, and actions to find out how they outmaneuvered more experienced and better-organized political rivals. The paper focuses on the period between the formation of the first nucleus of revolutionary state, the Revolution Council, in October 1978, to the premature termination of the moderate Interim Government in October 1979. I rely on archived interviews, published memoirs, meeting minutes, and newspaper reports collected in Iran or online. I find that the elite rivalry is not just about ideological frames, but also about operational forms. In the case of Iran, the very informality that radical revolutionary factions operate with assisted them in outmaneuvering more experienced and better organized political rivals even though the latter's expertise was needed and deployed. The process is likely to be at work in many postrevolutionary states in the short, understudied period of powerplay before radicals establish their upper hand and start erecting autocratic bureaucracies that contributes to their durable reign.

Year One of the Iranian Revolution
by Afshin Matin-Asgari / Professor of Middle East History, California State University, Los Angeles / amatina@calstatela.edu
During its early years, the Iranian Revolution was intensely debated by scholarly observers as well as political actors. Soon, these debates gave way to a consensus narrative that reads the revolution

teleologically as if its outcome, i.e., a clerical dictatorship, were preordained. This paper challenges the revolution's teleological historiography through a careful overview of the events of its first year. My main sources will be 1979 newspapers and periodicals, Ayandegan, Peygham-e Emruz, Azadi and Ketab-e Jom'eh, as well the memoirs and testimonies of Iranian revolutionary leaders and Carter administration diplomats with whom they interacted in 1978-1979.
I will argue that a clerically controlled state emerged as the revolution's outcome only after a faction attached to Khomeini outmaneuvered all contenders by confronting the revolution with a formidable foreign nemesis, namely the US. In this reading, the monarchy's collapse in fall 1978 opened the way for the unfolding of a deepening social revolution during the first half of 1979. In the absence of a functioning state, women, ethnic minorities, industrial workers, government employees, landless peasants, the urban poor and the intelligentsia, particularly university students, spurred by defiant leftist parties, were assaulting social hierarchy and private property. Khomeini's inner circle quickly realized they could lose political initiative unless power was monopolized in a new state built on the principle of the Guardianship of the Jurist. Initially an uphill struggle, the imposition of a clerical dictatorship became possible only when Khomeini launched a "Second Revolution," deliberately creating an existential faceoff with the US in the fall 1979 Hostage Crisis. All dissent was then crushed, and the aspirations of revolutionary masses were derailed and contained, while the Islamic Republic consolidated itself in a virtual state of war with the US.

Workers' showras: a revolution within the revolution
by Peyman Jafari / William and Mary / pjafari@wm.edu
Iran's 1979 revolution opened a period of intense popular participation, social experimentation, and intellectual debate, unfolding amidst political rivalries and repression that ultimately consolidated power around Ayatollah Khomeini and his supporters. This paper examines how these contradictory dynamics played out in the workplace, particularly within the oil industry, and explores the ways in which workers imagined a post-Pahlavi future. Drawing on archives, official newspapers, dissident publications, and oral histories, it investigates the debates and political conflicts that emerged in the showras (councils)—workplace organizations through which workers of diverse ideological orientations sought to exert control over production and management. The showras thus infused the post-revolutionary period with practices and discourses of participatory democracy and social justice. The paper argues that the confrontation between the post-revolutionary state and the showras reflected not only the tensions between supporters of political Islam and the Left, but also divisions within each camp. By foregrounding these fissures, the paper highlights the unrealized possibilities of political realignment, alternative trajectories, and social transformations cut short by the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War in 1980.

The Year of Imagination and Action: Turkmen Council Movement and Beyond
by Peyman Vahabzadeh / University of Victoria, Canada / peymanv@uvic.ca
The first year following 1979 Revolution, Iran witnessed the parallel movement of uninhibited imagination by Iranian diversity as well as increasing state repression. While the "Spring of Freedom" allowed for possible Irans to be articulated and debated, the rising Islamic state created military units and shut down newspapers, meetings, rallies of secular and religious opposition. As movements for an alternative, democratic Iran expanded, the state shut down newspapers and tried to restrict the activities of political parties and civil society associations outside of the state orbit. In this context, in the revolutionary days of February 1079, the Turkmen peasants launched a grassroots movement of occupation of the land that they were dispossessed of under the Pahlavi monarchy. They set up their village councils to oversee the process. Soon the council movement expanded and councils of women, fishermen, students, and many others emerged in the region. Turkmen intellectuals created

the coordination bodies for this movement that became the de facto governing body in Turkmen Sahra. The Turkmens created an exemplary model of grassroots, democratic participation linked to social justice and empowerment of disenfranchised social classes. At the height of Turkmen Council movement, in winter 1980 the state unleashed its carefully plotted military assault on the region that crushed the movement and assimilated the councils into attachments of the state before putting them out of operation altogether.

Room 1.15

99a. Conversation analytic studies of Persian talk-in-interaction: Making visible jointly accomplished practices

Chair: Ali R. Abasi

Ethnomethodological conversation analysis (CA) is increasingly becoming the methodology of choice for the study of linguistic practices in diverse contexts of social interaction (Ochs et al., 1996; Sidnell & Stivers, 2013). The appeal of this theoretical lens derives in part from its unique affordances to discover and render visible actions and practices that are routinely accomplished by interactants in both mundane and institutional forms of co-produced talk and to respecify and shed new light on various topics that have traditionally attracted scholarly attention in such disciplines as linguistics, communication, education, and others. In this proposed panel, four presenters share findings from their ongoing research projects conducted within the CA paradigm, showcasing the power of this methodological approach to generate new understandings about various interactional phenomena in diverse domains of social action. Using talk data of doctor-patient interactions in medical settings in Iran, Presenter One demonstrates how doctors and patients' joint orientation to the notion of face in the Iranian cultural context, known as 'âberu', is contingently accomplished by the interlocutors and informs their interaction. Presenter Two focuses on the final particle 'hâ' in Persian talk, explicating some of the functions it serves as well as the sequential and syntactic environments in which the particle is active. Presenter Three shares research findings on a heretofore unanalyzed practice in institutional talk in Persian, unpacking the various functions and outcomes that two placeholding linguistic devices accomplish for speakers. And lastly, Presenter Four focuses on the long-standing problem of competing, and oftentimes conflicting, descriptions of discourse markers in the research literature and their low praxeological validity to inform (Persian) second language teaching curricula, demonstrating empirically how the CA approach can help resolve these two interrelated problems.

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Describing discourse markers: The affordances of conversation analysis

by Ali R. Abasi / University of Maryland / aabasi@umd.edu

One long-standing problem plaguing the research literature on discourse markers is the proliferation of competing, and very often conflicting, descriptions of the functions that markers serve in talk. Two illustrative cases, for example, are 'well' in English (e.g., Blakemore, 2002; Schourup, 1999) and 'khob' in Persian (Aram & Meshkinfam, 2018; Ghaderi, 2021; Ghiasian & Rezaei, 2014). In many cases, it feels like there are as many different descriptions of the same marker as there are different analysts. While it is universally acknowledged that markers are multifunctional, the core questions to grapple with, as Beeching (2016, p. 6) notes, is whether all "interpretations" of discourse markers are equally valid and how analysts can ward off the criticism that they "can find whatever it is that they are seeking" when analyzing markers. From a pedagogical perspective, in order for descriptions to be able to inform instructional actions in the domain of (Persian) second language teaching, they need to meet two crucial descriptive criteria. Firstly, they must be empirically valid rather than speculative,

and secondly, they should be able to establish the “primary” (Maschler & Schiffrin, 2015), “default” (Levinson, 2000); or “canonical” (Heritage & Sorjonen, 2018) functions of the markers as opposed to their particularized or one-off uses. In this presentation, I argue that the (Neo)-Gricean approaches to discourse markers that paradigmatically focus on recovering speakers’ intended meanings are bound to be speculative and cannot meet these two descriptive criteria. Such descriptions, therefore, do not often offer the necessary solid ground on which to base pedagogical action. Using Persian talk data, I demonstrate empirically how the conversation analytic approach can result in descriptions that meet the two crucial criteria noted above, thereby rendering them pedagogically actionable in second language teaching.

On the interface of social cognition and interaction: Face in Persian medical interactions

by Ahmad Izadi / Adam Mickiewics University, Poland / ahmad.izadi.1975@gmail.com

Doctor-patient interaction (DPI) is central to medical consultation visits, playing a key role in medical interviews as a social institution. Talk in this context is organized around goal-directed activities, with expected limitations and possibilities, as well as inferences shaped by the medical setting (Drew and Heritage, 2005). However, talk here does not solely reflect professional institutional practices. It often also reflects the sociocultural practices of the society where it occurs, representing the social cognition or cultural schemas of the community of practice and the shared knowledge and understanding of the participants in the interaction.

This presentation explores a pervasive aspect of the Iranian mindset—face, reflected in the metaphor aaberu (literally 'water of the face')—and defined as a person's self-image in relation to others (Izadi, 2017, 2023). Using naturally occurring doctor-patient interactions as data and conversation analysis (CA) as the method, I demonstrate how aaberu is discursively co-constructed through participants' joint orientations to meaning and actions. Moreover, the study highlights the role of face in both institutional and relational practices of patients and doctors. Evidence from data collected during 150 medical consultations in Iranian outpatient care—audio-recorded and transcribed—supports these findings. This research builds upon the long-standing study of doctor-patient interactions (Heritage and Maynard, 2006) by incorporating the Persian language and culture, and emphasizing the relational aspects of doctor-patient communication, a relatively recent development (Scarvaglieri et al., 2022).

Keywords: social cognition, face, aaberu, Persian, doctor-patient interaction

99b. Disinformation and misinformation on social media in Iran

Chair: Hossein Kermani

Disinformation and misinformation have become a significant challenge in the contemporary political landscape (Freelon & Wells, 2020). This form of manipulative information weakens the promises of social media to create a more inclusive and democratic space where muted groups could raise their voices and, in particular, protest against dictatorships in non-democratic societies (Jungherr & Schroeder, 2021; McKay & Tenove, 2021). While sharing different forms of false information, like rumors or conspiracy theories, has been in non-democratic forces, particularly authoritarian regimes’ disposal for years, the emergence and popularity of digital media give them new opportunities to create and disseminate malicious messages (Tumber & Waisbord, 2021). In particular, the 2016 U.S. presidential election and the BREXIT referendum could arguably be seen as the turning points where disinformation, or fake news as a more popular label in the public sphere, became a major topic of public and academic debates (Armitage & Vaccari, 2021; Bastos & Mercea, 2019; Howard et al., 2018). Since then, researchers have studied the sheer number of cases of disinformation campaigns in different countries (Arnaudo, 2017; Bennett & Livingston, 2020; Bradshaw et al., 2021; Kapantai et al., 2021; Woolley & Howard, 2018).

Nevertheless, the existing literature is not only Western-centred to a large extent (Hameleers, 2022;

Kapantai et al., 2021), but it mainly concentrates on the role of the regimes and state actors when it comes to non-democratic societies (Alieva et al., 2022; Bolsover & Howard, 2019; King et al., 2017). In Iran, the regime used disinformation to attack protesters and delegitimize the anti-regime movement. On the other hand, opposition groups like monarchists also used disinformation for different aims and tactics. Despite the prevalence of disinformation on social platforms in Iran, our knowledge of actors, practices, networks, and aims of disinformation campaigns is niche. In fact, there is a critical research gap here that this panel tries to address by gathering several scholars who are working on the topic. The panel will analyze how different political groups in Iran (including the regime and opposition groups) employ and share disinformation on various social platforms and discuss the implications and consequences of the prevalence of untrue messages for the democratic movement in Iran.

Killing #MahsaAmini on Twitter: An analysis of the dark side of disinformation on Persian Twitter
by Hossein Kermani / University of Vienna / hosseinkermani@gmail.com
This paper disentangles the invisible aspects of disinformation agents and practices during political upheavals in authoritarian regimes, focusing on the #MahsaAmini movement on Persian Twittersphere. While the existing literature mainly concentrates on the visible side of disinformation, like social bots or clear-cut forms of falsehood, this research argues that disinformation could take more complicated forms shared by different types of inauthentic users. This dark side of disinformation could be overlooked by computational methods that have mainly been employed in this field. Therefore, we devised a multi-layered methodological design that combines human-driven critical discourse analysis with digital ethnography to delve deeper into the hidden layers of manipulation. We analyzed 36,255 popular Persian tweets shared by 4,807 users during the first two months of the movement, drawing on critical discourse analysis. This step was enriched by a digital ethnography spanning from the beginning of the movement on September 15, 2022, to March 30, 2023. Findings indicate that disinformation was propagated not only by pro-regime users but also by anti-regime accounts, revealing a "dark side" of disinformation that transcends conventional binaries. We also identified a group of suspicious users who appeared oppositional but covertly advanced the regime's agenda. Additionally, the ambiguity of the true nature of certain anti-regime users, automated or not, further complicated attribution and contributed to a broader ecosystem of distrust. At the practice level, the regime employed innovative strategies to cultivate uncertainty and cynicism, including the dissemination of unverified information and fabricated stories. These forms of disinformation, which, unlike simple falsehoods, are often resistant to verification, played a critical role in distorting public discourse. This research enhances our understanding of how the disinformation machine works in an understudied context, Iran, by shedding light on some overlooked aspects of it.

Rallying around the Flag: Imperial Nostalgia and the Spectacle of Monarchy
by Hoornaz Keshavarzian / Simon Fraser University / hkeshava@sfu.ca
Having put all his eggs in Israel's basket, "the failson" (Nikpour and Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, 2025), Reza Pahlavi has been revealed to have benefited from a coordinated AI-campaign, yet even with this engineered support, his popularity remains insignificant among Iranians. A network of inauthentic Israeli-based accounts that operate in Farsi have been exposed with key similarities including their synchronized posting patterns, with activity concentrated during the same hours of the day; their consistent use of the Twitter Web App, which is less commonly used that X's mobile applications; the use of stolen or generic profile pictures coupled with biographies that provide no identifying details; the dissemination of identical content, often repeating the same strings of hashtags; and their shared timeline, as all accounts were created in 2023 but stayed largely inactive until January 2025 (Fittarelli

et al., 2025). While bombing Iran in the 12-day war, this campaign calls for the restoration of the monarchy by relying on fake accounts masquerading as Iranians.
I argue that the regressive discourse of MIGA, Make Iran Great Again, chanted collectively yet unsurprisingly by imperial powers, reinforces “militarism with social repression” (Hardt and Mezzadra, 2024) which stands in deliberate and aggressive contrast to the ethos of the Woman, Life, Freedom movement by reviving an authoritarian nationalism (Keshavarzian and Stewart, 2025). Instead of offering political or rhetorical support to Iran and its allies in condemnation of Israel, an “internationalist approach” (Hardt and Mezzadra, 2024) from below should connect solidarity with Palestine and the Global South to movements like Woman, Life, Freedom, which directly contest the Islamic Republic repression and its necropolitical counterparts. Opposing the current war machine must involve not only disrupting present conflicts but also advancing broader social transformation that a monarchist horizon fails to provide.

Room 1.16

100. Circuits of Persian Publishing: Materiality, Networks, and Canon Formation

Chair: Laetitia Nanquette

What does Persian publishing look like when we trace its circuits alongside its institutions? This panel argues that Persian literary culture has been shaped both by centralised institutions and by the material forms, geographic routes, and alternative markets through which texts circulate, and that these channels work sometimes together, sometimes in tension, to determine what gets read and who gets canonised.
From the 18th century to the present, the panel examines how literary value has been produced and contested through books and newspapers. Rather than treating official publishing as the only norm, we explore how formal and informal channels have coexisted and competed, with manuscript decorators, Ottoman printing presses, and street vendors playing roles as significant as ministries of culture. The panel offers a materially grounded approach to literary history, attentive to how texts gain authority through how they look, where they travel, and whose hands they pass through. It traces the journeys of Persian texts across three historical moments, from the decorations that signaled literary affiliation in 18 and 19th-century manuscripts and lithographs, through the Persian newspapers published in Ottoman Istanbul (where geography and censorship made Tabriz closer to Turkey than Tehran), to the world of 21st-century Tehran book street markets.

Informal book circulation in 21st century Iran

by Laetitia Nanquette / Associate Professor Associate UNSW Sydney
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When examining the publishing industry of Iran, it is not enough to study only the official sector, as informal publishing, pirated books, and street bookshops form an essential part of the reading and publishing landscape. What role does informal publishing play in the Iranian publishing field? How has this sector evolved over the past two decades?
While the informal sector is visible in Iranian public spaces, on pavements and in metro stations, it is difficult to study systematically due to its fluid and largely illegal nature. For original publications, the informal sector is less developed than one might expect in such a constrained and regulated environment. Official print publications, unlike non-official print or online publications, still carry more prestige and are therefore preferred by many writers. However, for reprints and translations, the informal market is large and accounts for a significant share of books sold and read in Iran. This talk therefore focuses on analysing this sector.
The informal sector is made possible in part by the fact that Iran is not a signatory to most international copyright agreements. There is also a widespread "culture of the copy" (Sundaram,

2009) that must be taken into account. In this paper, I will use the publisher Jangal as a case study to examine the evolution of informal book circulation in twenty-first century Iran. Jangal is a well-known publisher that reproduces English-language texts with high-quality paper and covers, and operates a large bookshop in Tehran's central publishing district. Jangal builds its business on English-language bestsellers, such as Harry Potter and English classics. High school and university classes teaching English texts often rely on this publisher, which does not pay copyright fees to English or American publishers. As such, Jangal represents the contradictions and tensions at the heart of Iran's informal book market.

Visualizing Literary Affiliation, Bad Poetry, and Shadow Canons in 18th- and 19th-Century Persian Manuscripts

by Farshad Sonboldel / UCSD / fsonboldel@ucsd.edu

This paper investigates the physical and artistic features of a curated selection of 18th- and 19th-century Persian decorated manuscripts, focusing on the visual strategies that underpinned the formation of the modern literary canon. By systematically comparing the decorative elements across canonical, marginal, and popular poetic collections—including those often dismissed as "bad poetry"—the paper explores how the visual presentation of texts reflected and reinforced poets' affiliations with distinct literary movements, such as the Bāzgašt-e Adabi (Return Movement).

We argue that the shifting aesthetic and material quality of book decoration served as a crucial, non-textual indicator of poetic status, inclusion, and exclusion across this period of intense literary transition. The decorative choices made by patrons and scribes—or the deliberate absence of high-quality decoration—visually established a "shadow canon": the broad, ephemeral body of popular, regional, or stylistically déclassé poetry that circulated robustly alongside officially sanctioned works. Through comparative analysis, this paper situates manuscript decoration within broader processes of literary selection, dissemination, and canonization in the late pre-modern era, prior to the formal institutionalization of Persian literary studies. This approach offers new insights into the interplay between literary history, cultural movements, and the visual strategies used to signify poetic authority and affiliation within the dynamic, transregional networks that shaped the 18th- and 19th-century Persianate literary landscape.

Purveyors and Pundits: Persian Publishing in the Ottoman Empire and Beyond

by Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet / University of Pennsylvania / fks@upenn.edu

In 1876, a Persian newspaper, Akhtar, meaning "star," began publication in Istanbul and continued its pioneering role in modern Iranian journalism until 1896. It was the first major newspaper published outside of Iran. Aqa Muhammad Taher, a native of Tabriz, edited the journal. Tabriz's contiguity to the Ottoman Empire likely explains the appeal of Istanbul as an extraterritorial home for Persian newspapers. Istanbul became a familiar hub for Iranian intellectuals, exiles, and diplomats. While Akhtar was arguably the most famous Persian newspaper published in the Ottoman Empire, it was not the only one. The eminent Orientalist and scholar of Persian literature E.G. Browne, whose writings on the Persian periodical press remain an indispensable source for historians, maintained close ties to the literary figures of this era who promoted the Persian press.

As a literary language, Persian had a long-standing presence in the Ottoman domains, not only in Istanbul, but also in Iraq, Egypt, and the Levant. In 1331 AH, Hosayn Danesh published a textbook for teaching Persian in Istanbul. By the same token, Turkic culture, language, and politics in the Ottoman Empire left their imprint on Iran and Persian society. This paper will trace these cross-cultural currents and transnational "circuits" of knowledge as it considers the impact of Persian publishing in the Ottoman Empire and beyond. Finally, this essay will pay attention to matters of censorship and

control over the written word. It will reflect on the historical transition from “make news” to “fake news.”

Room 1.17

101. Philology I: Persian and the Critique of Philology

Chair: Mohammad Tavakoli-Targhi, Erik Blackthorne-O'Barr

In recent years, scholars within Persianate Studies have worked to denaturalize the association between language, literature, and national culture which emerged in the wake of eighteenth-century philology, in large part by highlighting pre-national modes of Persianate worldliness. And yet, as is well known, Persian also played a foundational role in the philological revolution itself – that is, as both the text and context of philology’s rise as an epistemology and discipline. As such, this panel asks: beyond the study of the Persianate as linguistic modernity’s prior, could Persian (broadly defined) represent a privileged site for an immanent critique of language, literature and culture more generally? Alongside responding to the particular claims of ethnonationalist literary history, can the Persianate allow us to destabilize language itself as a discrete object of analysis? The papers in this panel each utilize Persian or the Persianate as a frame through which to critically approach the categories of philological reason and its various disciplinary articulations, including orientalism, historical linguistics, and comparative literature.

Sequenced roughly chronologically, the first paper of this panel examines the early and mid-nineteenth-century Caucasus as a laboratory for the emergence of philological-racial categories. Placing together the linguistic writings of Julius von Klaproth (1783-1835) and Fath-Ali Akhundzadeh (1812-1878), including the latter’s attempted project of Perso-Ottoman script reform, this paper argues that centering the Caucasus allows us to disrupt a transhistorical notion of the Persian language. The second paper examines the late nineteenth-century Ottoman poet Muallim Naci (1850-1893), whose pluralistic approach to language constitutes him as an impossible figure within the conceptual schema of world literature. Yet Naci’s poetics, this paper argues, allow us to challenge the rooting of world literature in ethno-linguistics and instead reimagine it in a translative, ethical-aesthetic mode. The third paper builds upon the previous by focusing on Naci’s ideological opponents, the founding figures of Turkish national literature: Halide Edip (1884-1964), Ömer Seyfettin (1884-1920), and Mehmet Fuat Köprülü (1890-1966). Examining their conceptualization of Persian as a universal corrupter of language and culture, this paper proposes that it was precisely by theorizing the Persianate that these authors began to deconstruct the notion of individual languages as such. The final paper continues the theme of the Persianate as the disruptive and dislocative by examining how, in the 1968 novel Shazdeh Ehtejab, author Houshang Golshiri (1938-2000) utilizes the theme of madness to frustrate any attempt to definitively locate a nationalized language, history, and culture.

‘Its Very Perfection a Danger:’ Persian and the Deconstruction of Language

by Erik Blackthorne-O'Barr / Princeton University / eab2255@columbia.edu

For Ottoman Turkish intellectuals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the privileged place of Persian within philological and racial discourse represented a considerable theoretical challenge. The survival of Persian into the post-Islamic period, and the pervasive influence of Persian literary culture, were both taken by nineteenth-century philology as prima facie evidence for an inherent Aryan vitalism; against this, the highly Persianate character of Ottoman Turkish language and literature could only testify to an essentially imitative and moribund culture. Ottoman writers and thinkers responded by reversing the terms of this discourse: the influence of Persian culture was reconceived as a ‘contagious disease’ that transmuted previously living, if flawed, languages into perfect Persianate fossils.

By the 1910s, this view would be shared and extended by the founding intellectuals of the Turkish National Literature movement, among them the novelist Halide Edip (1884-1964), the writer Ömer Seyfettin (1884-1920), and theliterary historian Mehmet Fuat Köprülü (1890-1966). This paper examines the writings of these three figures during this decade, and their particular understandings of the Persianate as the universal corrupter of cultures and literatures; a view that, in its most extreme form, imagined Persian as a transhistorical, parasitic force upon language itself. Yet despite its origins in nationalist reaction, this paper argues that this rhetorical turn towards universality in fact offered a surprising path out of philological-racial particularism, and the ready association between language, nation, and culture. Ultimately, it challenges the binary opposition between ethnonationalism and Persianate worldliness in much contemporary scholarship, and proposes instead that this notion of the corrupting Persian laid the conceptual basis for a new theorization of a singular, universal human language: a project that would subsequently be taken up in the radical linguistic reforms of the Turkish Republic.

Against Nativist History: Houshang Golshiri's Prince Ehtejab

by Atefeh Akbari Shahmirzadi / Barnard College / aakbaris@barnard.edu

In Houshang Golshiri's Shazdeh Ehtejab (Prince Ehtejab) (1968), the eponymous prince seeks to trace his lineage. By extension, I argue, the text attempts to establish the genealogy of socio-political and historical systems of knowledge production in twentieth century Iran. But both the prince's attempts and that of the text are disrupted. In this paper, I will demonstrate how the prince's insistence on finding answers to the political questions of the present in the historical past of empire leads to his insanity, and how, concomitantly, the narrative's play with the Persian language resists a straightforward engagement with questions oriented toward the construction of a national history and genealogy. I thus read his insanity as a textual subversion of the role that native history plays in the development of a national literary language and culture. This sets the stage for my introduction of the Persianate as a method that can open up new analytical pathways in literary studies, given that the long history of the Persianate world challenges the seemingly straightforward categories of national language, culture, and identity.

The Caucasian Talk Circle: Persian Philology between Klaproth and Akhundzadeh

by Amir Izadpanah / Columbia University / ai2487@columbia.edu

The Caucasus plays an unforgettable role in the memory of Iranian modernity. On one hand, and in the first decades of the 19th century, this region signified memories of territorial loss as a result of two Russo-Persian Wars. It also marked the emergence of the question of Iranian backwardness, i.e., the well-known Abbas Mirza Question. On the other hand, the answer to that very question is often deemed to have emerged from the same region and in the works of Mirza Fath-Ali Akhundzadeh (Fatali Akhundov). He introduced to our memory of Iranian modernity long-standing problems such as the figure of the intellectual, the relationship between progress and religion, and the necessity of language reformation. There is, however, a forgotten side to this Caucasian story.

By revisiting this context, first through the works of Julius von Klaproth, I will demonstrate how the Caucasus in the first half of the 19th century functioned as a laboratory for European Philology. It was through the collaboration of the Russian Imperial expansion with the German Philology of the Goettingen school (a philology often mistakenly exempted from the imperial involvements of its British and French counterparts) that crucial constructs, such as "Indo-Germanic", "Indo-European", and "the Caucasian race", were coined. I will also show how revisiting Akhundzadeh's project of alphabet reform (in tandem with those of his interlocutors in Tehran and Istanbul) will help us reconsider our philological premises about the Persian language. I aim to take away from Iranian and

Persianate Studies the suprahistorical assumption that the Persian language, in itself and in relation to other languages, was always perceived as we perceive it today.

Muallim Naci (1850-1893) and The Philological Ends of World Literature

by Mehtap Ozdemir / Emory University / mehtap.ozdemir@emory.edu

World literature's engagement with the Ottoman context has been, at best, tangential. Whether we understand world literature as a historical-philological paradigm or a multilingual literary market of exchange and translation, when such values as originality, indigeneity, and canonicity are accepted as the grounds of literary sovereignty, the Ottoman context figures an absent presence. It is either the contact zone which mediated the travel and translation of Oriental texts into European languages, thus facilitating the emergence of Oriental philological studies, or the historical specter that haunts the exilic home of comparative literature's founding fathers. In each instance, it is a context in which world literary phenomena take place, but not a significant vantage point for world literary knowledge.

In an attempt to revisit and redress the invisibility of Ottoman letters in world literary studies, this paper turns to a relatively minor Ottoman poet and translator, Muallim Naci, whose poetics, drawing on Qur'anic aesthetics and Ottoman literary heteroglossia, offers an alternative understanding of "world literature," one that moves beyond its frequent formulations as a set of text, a literary marketplace, or a mode of translational canonicity. Instead, Naci's plurilingual and relational poetics makes it manifest that if world literature is haunted by a pursuit of origins, literary origin does not lie in an imaginary ethno-linguistic archē, to be actualized in the telos of "nation-state," but in the double ends of language which moves between human and divine, body and soul, unity and multiplicity, and subjection and subjectification. In doing so, Naci's poetics configures world literature as an ethical-aesthetic horizon, whereby the appropriative subject of philology disperses into the discontinuous temporality of translation.

Room 1.18

102. Evolving Traditions: Creativity, Memory, and Musical Agency in the Global Iranian Soundscape

Chair: Hesam Abedini

This panel explores classical and popular Persian music as living systems of creativity in which formal structures serve not as restrictive frameworks but as generative engines for innovation, identity formation, and cultural expression. By treating musical form as an active mode of thought rather than a static inheritance, the panel examines how Persian musical traditions continue to evolve across transnational contexts, articulating new meanings in response to historical change, displacement, and cultural memory.

The first paper investigates the work of Ardavan Kamkar, analyzing how contemporary santur performance expands the expressive and technical capacities of classical Persian music through alternative tunings, new compositional logics, and a re-centering of the instrument as a site of musical agency beyond the radif tradition. The second paper examines the diasporic popular compositions of Sadegh Nojouki, demonstrating how his orchestral pop style mobilizes nostalgia as a cultural force, producing a sonic archive through which displaced Iranian listeners negotiate memory, longing, and identity. The third paper analyzes Hossein Omoumi's use of the Persian ghazal as a formal musical structure, arguing that its modular poetic architecture underlies the modal system of classical Persian music and enables openness, hybridity, and the incorporation of diverse poetic voices. Together, these papers illustrate how innovation in Persian music emerges from within the tradition's own formal logic, revealing classical and popular Persian music as dynamic cultural practices that generate new expressive horizons across Iran and its global diaspora.

Ghazal as Formal Structure in Music: The Poetic Architecture Underlying Classical Persian Music in Hossein Omoumi's Voices of Spring

by Hesam Abedini / California State University, Fullerton / habedini@fullerton.edu

In classical Persian music, poetry does not serve as ornament or inspiration alone; it constitutes the very architecture of the musical system, determining its formal organization and guiding its modal trajectory. This paper examines Voices of Spring, an album composed and produced by Hossein Omoumi, as a case study through which to explore this fundamental structural relationship between the Persian ghazal and the modal system of radif. Omoumi employs a recurring line from one of Khayyam's tarjiʿāt to connect poems from multiple classical poets across different poetic forms, creating a unified musical narrative in which poetic refrain functions analogously to forud—the modal "return" that cyclically returns the listener to the darāmad, or modal home.

By highlighting this relationship, I argue that the ghazal's formal characteristics—its modularity, autonomy of individual couplets, and recurring rhyme—directly shape the improvisatory logic of classical Persian music, allowing movement across diverse gushehs while maintaining an underlying structural coherence. Drawing on Omoumi's analytical framework, which adapts Karl Ludwig von Bertalanffy's General Systems Theory to classical Persian music, I propose that the modal system is best understood as a dynamic, open system rooted in the formal structure of Persian ghazal. This approach is further contextualized through engagement with the writings of Rouhollah Khaleghi and Hossein Dehlavi, both of whom underscore poetry as the generative force of musical creativity in Iran.

Voices of Spring, through its integration of poems from differing periods and forms, demonstrates the inherent flexibility of this poetic-musical system and its capacity to absorb modern textual material without disrupting its structural integrity. In doing so, it reveals classical Persian music not as a static historical form, but as a living tradition whose foundations in poetry make it uniquely open to innovation, hybridity, and contemporary expression.

Beyond the Radif: Innovation, Identity, and Instrumental Agency in Ardavan Kamkar's Santur Playing

by Mehdi Rezania / Independent scholar / rezania@ualberta.ca

In the 1980s, at a remarkably young age, Ardavan Kamkar—an exceptionally gifted santur player and composer—pushed the expressive and technical boundaries of the instrument and, by extension, the possibilities of Persian classical music further than perhaps any of his contemporaries. By the late twentieth century, the santur had become central among younger musicians (Atrai 1990, 4) for its capacity to accommodate diverse musical approaches. Kamkar expanded these possibilities through new techniques, innovative forms, novel tuning systems, and the integration of radif, folk materials, and Western compositional methods. He coined the term "contemporary santur playing" to describe a synthesis of these innovations, including alternative tunings and new programming structures that extend beyond the traditional dastgāh system.

Kamkar's work, however, remains deeply rooted in Persian classical music. Though it may initially appear distant from the radif, deeper analysis reveals a strong connection to the historical lineage of santur performance. Unlike many predecessors who privileged the radif—itself largely shaped by tar techniques—Kamkar places the instrument itself at the center of innovation, transforming it from a vehicle for transmitting repertoire into an autonomous medium of creativity. His music also reflects the turbulent context of his era: sweeping cultural policy shifts after 1979 and the anxieties of the Iran–Iraq War imbue it with a sense of rebelliousness, urgency, and emotional intensity. Alongside Ostad Faramarz Payvar and Ostad Parviz Meshkatian, Kamkar stands as one of the principal figures who have defined contemporary santur performance and reimagined the expressive potential of Persian classical music.

Echoes of Home: Nostalgia and Musical Memory in the Works of Sadegh Nojouki

by Behzad Namazi / Ohio University / bn290413@ohio.edu

Sadegh Nojouki (b. 1950) is a prominent Iranian composer and arranger, who has composed works for some of the most prolific Persian pop vocalists during the past 50 years. This paper investigates Nojouki's musical style, through the lens of nostalgia, as both an aesthetic and cultural construct. Active primarily from the 1970s onward, and particularly influential in the post-revolutionary Iranian diaspora centered in Los Angeles, Nojouki's compositions fuse Western pop orchestration with traditional Persian melodic sensibilities, evoking a sense of longing for a pre-revolutionary cultural past. Drawing on theories of affect, exile, and musical memory, this study analyzes key stylistic elements in Nojouki's compositional works, such as the use of traditional Persian modes (dastgah), lyrical themes of lost love and homeland, and lush orchestral arrangements, as mechanisms that articulate a diasporic nostalgia. Through close readings of select compositions and their cultural connotations, this paper argues that Nojouki's music functions not only as entertainment but also as a sonic archive imbued with strands of nostalgia and a collective sense of longing for the homeland among displaced Iranian audiences. This study situates Nojouki's musical style within broader ethnomusicological discourses on musical memory, cultural identity, and diasporic exile in post-revolutionary Iranian popular culture.

Room 2.17

103. Reimagining Freedom: Gender, Myth, and the Narrative Politics of the "Woman, Life, Freedom" Movement

Chair: Azadeh Momeni

This panel explores how contemporary Iranian and diasporic expressions reinterpret myth, space, and narrative to articulate resistance within and beyond Iran. Bringing together literary analysis, feminist theory, and spatial politics, the panel examines the Woman, Life, Freedom movement as both a political uprising and a cultural renaissance.

Through the lens of storytelling and narrative memory, the first paper traces how personal testimonies, oral histories, and diasporic narratives preserve collective experience and transform trauma into transnational solidarity. Another contribution investigates the spatial politics of the hijab, positioning the female body as a frontier where state control and resistance intersect. A third paper addresses the taboo of female sexuality and queerness, revealing how expressions of desire challenge patriarchal norms and expand the boundaries of revolutionary discourse. The final paper reimagines the myth of the Simurgh as a metaphor for unity, wisdom, and rebirth in the ongoing struggle for freedom.

Together, these papers argue that the Woman, Life, Freedom movement constitutes a narrative revolution—transforming silenced bodies, myths, and memories into instruments of empowerment and liberation.

Narrating "Woman, Life, Freedom": Literary Forms, Diasporic Storytelling, and the Narrative Memory of a Movement

by Bahar Momeni / The University of Texas at Dallas / baahaar.momeni@gmail.com

This article explores the reciprocal relationship between literature and the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement, with particular attention to non-fiction storytelling and diasporic narratives. It examines how personal and collective accounts have not only shaped the movement's global visibility but also how the movement has transformed narrative practices across Iranian and diasporic communities. Rooted in decades of gendered oppression and catalyzed by state violence and collective grief, the uprising has generated a powerful archive of testimony. Oral histories, personal narratives, public acts of defiance, and digital storytelling

have become urgent tools for preserving memory, expressing resistance, and forging transnational solidarity.
Diasporic storytelling plays a pivotal role in this archive, translating the movement's emotional and political urgency into narratives that cross cultural and linguistic boundaries. Iranian writers, activists and community members in exile have shared lived experiences of displacement, protest, and loss in non-fiction formats that function not only as documentation but also as acts of agency, reclaiming historical presence through voice.
Literature has not only responded to the movement but also helped shape its symbolic language. Mythological motifs from Persian literary tradition—such as Zahak's tyranny, a lasting image of despotism, and Farangis's act of hair-cutting in mourning from Ferdowsi's Shahnameh—have been reimagined as gestures of rebellion and transformation. This literary act has transcended its origin to become one of the movement's most iconic symbols, as women across Iran and the diaspora publicly cut their hair in defiance, echoing Farangis's act as a collective demand for justice.
In this way, literature becomes a repository of cultural memory, shaping the movement's expressive grammar and anchoring its resistance in long-standing archetypes of moral defiance and resilience. Ultimately, the article argues that non-fiction storytelling—especially in diasporic voices—has been central to preserving Woman, Life, Freedom as both lived experience and historical record. Through testimony and narrative, the movement becomes more than a political event: it becomes a living literary archive sustained by those who resist silence and reclaim voice as a vehicle for remembrance, solidarity, and transformation.

Woman, Life, Freedom: Taboos of sexual freedom and queerness
by Shirin Khayambashi / Toronto Metropolitan University / khayams@torontomu.ca
The woman, life, freedom movement is arguably the most successful movement in post-Islamic revolution Iran that raised global awareness about the ongoing Iranian gender apartheid. While the movement gained global attention, it is not devoid of limitations. One of the sources of violence experienced by Iranian women is the dismissal of female sexual agency. Female sexual desire has been a taboo topic and has remained in the margins of the movement. Part of the discussion of female sexual agency is sapphic/lesbian sexual desires, which negatively affect the legitimacy of the activists and victims. This presentation focuses on the controversy surrounding Nika Shakarami's sexual identity. Nika Shakarami was a teenage activist murdered by the Islamic Republic of Iran's guards. The idea of Nika's online romantic desires toward other women had appeared as such a taboo topic that it led to controversies that blamed both the Islamic Republic of Iran and Iranian queer organizations in attempts to smear her reputation. Part of the controversy focused on IRI's use of queer discourse to delegitimize the movement, and the other part argued that diasporic Iranian queer organizations are taking advantage of the movement to further their agenda. The idea of sexual desire and queerness are so tabooed that the general public is willing to perceive it as a conspiracy to invalidate the movement. To better understand this severe reaction to the news regarding Nika Shakarami's murder, this research reflects on historical and cultural discourses of female sexuality and the representation of lesbian/sapphic sexuality within an Iranian context. In this presentation, I will ask two interrelated questions: how have female sexuality and queerness been explored in Iranian culture and consequently during the recent movement, and how does the dominant Iranian discourse of gender and sexuality govern sexual and gender politics?

From Myth to Movement: The Simurgh and the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' in Iran
by Azadeh Momeni / University of Toronto / momeni.azadeh@gmail.com

This paper explores the transformation of the mythical Simurgh from Persian literature into a powerful contemporary metaphor for Iran's ongoing women-led movement, "Woman, Life, Freedom." Originating in ancient Persian mythology and elaborated in texts such as Ferdowsi's Shahnameh, Rumi's Masnavi, and especially Attar's Conference of the Birds, the Simurgh symbolizes divine wisdom, unity, and illumination. In Attar's allegory, the birds' arduous journey toward the Simurgh reveals that the divine presence they seek resides within themselves—a reflection of self-realization and collective awakening. The paper argues that this ancient myth has reemerged as a living reality in Iran's current sociopolitical context, where women have risen as agents of transformation, embodying the Simurgh's benevolent strength, wisdom, and glory (Farr).
The study interprets Farr—the "inner light" or spiritual guidance—as the invisible yet unifying leadership of the movement. Unlike the 1979 Revolution, which relied on charismatic authority, this movement thrives on collective consciousness, creativity, and moral courage. Through nonviolent resistance and interethnic solidarity, Iranians—Kurds, Persians, Baluchis, Azeris, and others—have transcended divisions imposed by the Islamic Republic. The Simurgh's revival thus signifies a rebirth of Iranian identity rooted in inclusivity, dignity, and the rejection of patriarchal and authoritarian power.
Ultimately, the paper contends that the myth of the Simurgh offers not merely a literary symbol but a political and philosophical framework for understanding the Iranian people's struggle for freedom. The young generation's wisdom, courage, and refusal to yield to repression illuminate a new path toward a just and harmonious society—one where, as in Attar's vision, the seekers themselves become the source of transformation: the Simurgh reborn.

Materials of Resistance: Female Hair in Contemporary Iranian Art
By Yasaman Bathaee / y.bathaee@students.uu.nl
As a deeply personal and culturally charged element, hair—particularly female head hair—serves as a threshold between individuality and societal norms, carrying profound symbolic and political significance in art. In Iran, the hijab and the practice of covering hair have long been subjects of socio-political contention. This paper examines one series and seven case studies—Echoes behind the Veil (2024) by Nasim Moghadam, Exode (2023) by Yosra Mojtahedi, The Sleep of Reason (2023) by Saeedeh Masoumeh Mohtadi, Chelgis Series (2007–2023) by Mandana Moghaddam, Sentinel (2017–18), Symmetry (2017), and Collaboration (2017) by Sanne De Wolf, and Hijab (2013) by Maryam Palizgir—in which unveiled hair functions as a material of resistance against systemic oppression.
By focusing on the materiality of hair, this paper explores how these artists challenge and redefine the boundaries imposed by the Islamic Republic of Iran on the female body, transforming hair into a politically charged symbol of autonomy and defiance. Drawing on Nawal El Saadawi's The Hidden Face of Eve (1977) and Amelia Jones's Seeing Differently (2012), and employing the concepts of visibility, materiality, and agency, the paper argues that women's hair constitutes a contested site of agency—where the female body is both asserted and regulated. Ultimately, it asks how visibility, for marginalized bodies, can simultaneously empower and endanger, revealing the complex politics of representation embedded within contemporary Iranian art.

Room 2.18

104. Beyond Sharia: The Role of Sufism in Shaping Islam

Chair: Asghar Seyed-Gohrab

This panel examines the emergence, flourishing and lasting appeal of various non-conformist movements such as wise-fools, qalandars, and malamatis in Islamic intellectual history from the 10th century to the present day. Each paper examines how these antinomian hierarchies in the Islamic society challenged, redefined or sometimes rejected Islamic canonical law through questions they

posed in their poetic, philosophical and political writings and teachings. The works and the reception history of poets such as Sana'i, Khayyam, 'Attar, Rumi, and Feyzi are the focus of this panel. In the early Islamic period renunciative and ascetic movements emerged, reacting to the luxurious lives of Muslims, questioning what true Islam and a true Muslim are. Asceticism was a demonstrative rejection of what the ascetics considered to be a corrupt society, and a way to protect their own piety from the dangers of hypocrisy. The papers in this panel demonstrate the role of various non-conformist hierarchies in society by examining the works of several major Persian poets.

Literary Qalandars: Ḥakīm Sanā'ī's Qalandariyyāt Poetry and Society
by Alexandra Nieweg / Utrecht University / a.z.nieweg@uu.nl
Today, Islam is often depicted in the West as exclusively orthodox and Sharīʿa-centred. Persian classical qalandariyyāt poetry, however, shows that from the 6th/12th century onwards Islam was mainly understood through mystical ideas and doctrines. These were chiefly communicated to a broad Muslim audience in the Persianate world through the vehicle of antinomian motifs, metaphors, imagery, and stories. The aim of qalandariyyāt poetry was to challenge religious hierarchy and Islamic orthodoxy, and it formed a central part of antinomian movements which were a major part of religious life at the time. For this reason, this poetry forms an important contribution to a more complete and accurate understanding of Islam. Despite this, scholarship on the topic leaves us with various questions regarding the relations between qalandariyyāt poetry and the society in which it was created. One major question is to what extent antinomian poetry took inspiration from existing people who can be classified as 'antinomian'? In addressing such questions, I shall focus on the qalandariyyāt poetry of Ḥakīm Sanāʾī (d. 1131). It is in Sanāʾī's oeuvre that this poetry appeared in its fully-fledged form for the first time. I further address some questions related to Sanāʾī's contemporary ideas of belief and unbelief in the context of his qalandarī poetry. How does he conceive of belief? Why does he stress the importance of unbelief? Does Sanāʾī redefine Islam and piety?

Who was Threatened by Jahān-Malik Khātun's Ghazals?
by Zhinia Noorian / Utrecht University / zhinianoorian@gmail.com
Jahān-Malik Khātun (d. ca. 784/ 1382), the Īnjūʾīd princess is the most prolific woman in Persian classical literature. Being a royal woman gave her access to education and literary training. She was a poet at the court of her uncle, Shah Abū Isḥāq (d. 1359), the last Īnjū ruler who was a devout patron of Persian poetry. She had built a public presence as a literary figure. Jahān-Malik Khātun both held convivial gatherings and is said to have participated in poetry recitations with Hāfez (d. ca. 792/1390) in her uncle's court. Her work was received, although not amicably, by her other major contemporaries. There are slanderous remarks by Salmān Sāvajī (d. 1376) and Kamāl-i Khujandī (d. 1400–01) for example, ridiculing her for writing ghazals. With more that 1400 ghazals, comparable in quality and content to those written by Hāfez (d. ca. 792/1390), her contribution has remained understudied. In this presentation, I will walk you through the significant, but obscured aspects of Jahān-Malik Khātun's Divān highlighting her transgressive presence and obscurity in two male dominated worlds of Persian ghazal and Sufism.

Antinomian poetics and the Mughal Aesthetics of Unbelief: the Case of Feyżī Fayyāżī
by Fatemeh Naghshvarian / Utrecht University / f.naghshvarian@uu.nl
What if kufr ('unbelief') was not seen as the opposite of belief, but understood as an essential epistemology for perceiving truth? In the literary and intellectual tradition that the Mughal court both inherited and helped shape, Persianate antinomianism (literally anti-nomos, meaning "against the norm"), broadly understood as the rejection of legalistic Sharia law, continued to exercise its

power as a codified and critical mode of expression. Prominently articulated through poetry, antinomianism, with its disregard for imitation and ritualistic piety, remained a fertile political and philosophical site in early modern Indo-Persian thought. It inspired radical ways of reimagining the sacred by emphasizing authentic spiritual experience, critiquing the hypocrisy embedded in normative morality, and cultivating an intellectual curiosity beyond tradition. This paper explores how antinomian motifs were not only celebrated but also actively cultivated within the ideological framework of Akbar's Ṣulḥ-i Kull ('universal peace'). The poetry of Feyżī Fayyāżī, poet laureate at Akbar's court, exemplifies a deep intellectual engagement with the tensions between doctrinal epistemologies and experimental mystical practices. Drawing on Sufi traditions, Feyżī's verse evokes the antinomian language of blasphemy, wine, eroticism, and doubt not merely as aesthetic devices, but as provocations for spiritual inquiry. His poetry is rooted in a poetics of contradiction, where spiritual realization emerges through paradox and the dismantling of binary oppositions. Feyżī's antinomian vision places him within a longstanding, interregional constellation of heterodox mystics. This lineage is reframed within the unique religio-political context of Akbar's empire, which was ruled by a Muslim Turko-Mongol dynasty governing a majority non-Muslim population. In this historical setting, Feyżī's literary contributions helped articulate and advance a culture of multiplicity, where poetry served as a medium of spiritual exploration and a reflection of the complexities of human experience. By reading Feyżī's oeuvre as a site of antinomian critical thinking, this paper seeks to delineate his contributions to the intellectual currents of his time, the development of Persian poetics, and the broader cultural vision of the Mughal empire.

Searching for God in the Tavern (Kharābat): The Appeal of Rūmī's Qalandarī Motifs in the Modern World

by Maarten Holtzapffel / Utrecht University / m.c.f.holtzapffel@uu.nl

Few Persian poets have experienced such a dynamic and varied reception in the west as Rūmī. From the first European translation of his poetry by Sir William Jones in 1791 to today's global fascination with his work—often referred to as 'Rūmī-mania'—his poetry has been continuously reinterpreted across different social, cultural, and historical contexts. Across centuries, Rūmī's poetry has been adapted to fit changing intellectual and cultural landscapes. But why has his work remained so widely read, and what makes it so adaptable to new interpretations? In this paper, I argue that in order to understand this phenomenon, we should move beyond the idea that Rūmī's poetry has simply been appropriated by different intellectual and cultural movements. Instead, we should also consider how Rūmī's use of themes and motifs attracts people from various walks of life, and how his poetry itself invites multiple readings.

In this paper, I investigate Rūmī's use of qalandarī motifs and their modern reception. Such motifs stem from the genre of qalandariyyat poetry and centre around the qalandar figure, a vagabond, a libertine who mocks and transgresses societal norms and receives society's blame (malāmat) in order to protect inner piety which is based on the unconditional love for God. The qalandar is often juxtaposed with the conventional representatives of Islam such as Islamic scholars and preachers who are suspected of arrogance, hypocrisy, and of showing off their piety merely for the worldly gain and community's veneration. In this paper, I argue that such qalandarī motifs have contributed to Rūmī's immense popularity in the west from the 1960's onwards.

Room 2.19

105. Roundtable: Israel's June 2025 War on Iran: Reflections on Contested Publics and Media

Chair: Nahid Siamdoust

In June 2025, Iran witnessed its first direct experience of war on its own soil since the Iran-Iraq conflict of the 1980s, following Israel's unexpected aerial bombardments. Over the course of the 12-day war, Iranians inside the country turned to social media to express fear, solidarity, and concern,

while civil and political actors—both domestic and diasporic—articulated divergent responses to the attacks. This roundtable explores the contested terrain of Iranian public and media discourse, shaped by a wide array of actors including state institutions, grassroots movements, diaspora media outlets, and foreign interests.
Drawing on discourse and media analysis, panelists examine how various stakeholders framed and responded to a war marked by profound contradictions—most notably denounced by a broad spectrum of Iranians. Particular attention will be given to voices from within Iran, including women's rights activists and political prisoners, whose perspectives complicate dominant narratives. One of the war's most jarring moments—the Israeli bombardment of Evin prison, which claimed at least 71 lives under the purported aim of liberation—serves as a focal point for unpacking these contradictions.
The roundtable also interrogates the convergence between Israeli media and pro-royalist Pahlavi platforms, revealing the disinformation and propaganda campaigns that shaped public discourse. This includes the appropriation of the "Woman, Life, Freedom" slogan to justify military aggression, and the Iranian state's own instrumentalization of pre-Islamic mythology for nationalist propaganda. Additionally, the panel critiques the role of U.S. television networks in amplifying diaspora voices that often lacked credibility or nuance in supporting the Israeli rationale for war.
By offering a multifaceted analysis of popular and media narratives surrounding the June 2025 war, this roundtable aims to illuminate the complex and contested public sphere with enduring stakes in Iran's political future.

Messaging Iran: Israeli Propaganda in Persian During the 12-Day War
by Rasmus Christian Elling / Associate Professor, Head of Section, PI / elling@hum.ku.dk
This paper presents an analysis of Israel's Persian-language wartime propaganda during the 12-Day War of June 2025, focusing on content from the Israeli Defence Forces' and the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Telegram channels aimed at Iranian audiences. Using scraped, coded posts, the analysis shows how Telegram's hybrid affordances enabled real-time messaging that integrated military, political and psychological operations within a wider pro-Israeli media ecosystem. Apart from justifying Israel's launch of conventional war against Iran with reference to a threat perception anchored in both techno-legal and transhistorical arguments, the key narratives tailormade for the Iranian audience drew on history, culture and ideological claims, all aimed at generating a binary split between "the people" and "the regime". These narratives, in turn, were directly connected to the transnational and diasporic Iranian political scene and to the lingering, unresolved question of "regime change". In particular, there were clear links between the Persian-language propaganda produced in Israel and that of Reza Pahlavi, dubbed Iran's exiled "crown prince" by some, and his generally right wing monarchist supporters in the diaspora. While the Israeli propaganda, in some respects, was innovative and sophisticated, it also betrayed central contradictions stemming from the propagandist conundrum: How do you defend bombing a country whose people you claim to support?

"Not in Our Name": Insights from an Archive on Iran's Women's (Rights) Advocates
by Kristin Soraya Batmanghelichi / University of Oslo / k.s.batmanghelichi@ikos.uio.no
As analysts and pundits continue to grapple with the complex implications of the military actions taken by Israel and the United States against Iran in June 2025, the Iranian populace is left to confront the aftermath. Their anxiety escalates in response to the "snapback" of UN sanctions and pervasive challenges, including ongoing water and electricity shortages and the erosion of civil and political rights. For women's rights activists, this Twelve-Day War served not as a divisive force but as a unifying rallying cry, echoing a long-standing slogan: "No to Gaza, No to Lebanon, We will die only

for Iran." Other prominent slogans included, "No to War, Not in Our Name." As 2024 Nobel Peace Laureate Narges Mohammadi has noted, "War does not have the capacity for the fundamental transformation that the Iranian people seek." The question arises: how have other Iranian women's advocates and justice-seeking individuals responded to and reflected on the unfolding conflict during and after those pivotal two weeks? What are their views on Iran's self-determination, nationalist discourse in the face of external threats, government suppression of civil society, and the nation's military-security infrastructure? By analyzing art historian and cultural critic Leili Adibfar's Jadaliyya archive of key political statements and public memory from this historic period, I will examine the perspectives of Iranian feminists and women's advocacy groups, while providing comparative analyses that consider generational factors, media usage and dissemination, and geographical (diasporic) contexts.

The Israeli media and the public perspectives on the war and Iran

by Lior Sternfeld / Penn State / lbs18@psu.edu

Israeli media discourse about Iran operates within an echo chamber of wishful thinking and willful ignorance that shapes public perception and enables reckless policy. This presentation analyzes three dominant fantasies promoted by Israeli commentators, politicians, and media panels. First, Israeli media platforms exiled opposition figures like Reza Pahlavi as legitimate alternatives to the Islamic Republic, despite these diaspora voices possessing zero credibility inside Iran. Television panels recycle outdated narratives from 1979, presenting political analysis as fact. Second, Israeli pundits perpetuate the myth that Iran is a "fragile coalition of tribes waiting to fall apart," ignoring decades of Iranian national cohesion. This fantasy, repeated endlessly in Israeli media, reveals more about Israeli desires than Iranian realities. Third, Israeli public discourse remains oblivious to how military strikes resonate within Iranian political consciousness—invoking traumas from the 1953 Mossadegh coup to the 2003 Iraq invasion that Iranians reference constantly. Israeli media's failure to engage with Iranian perspectives, its reliance on diaspora outlets and sources, and its amplification of regime-change fantasies create a dangerous consensus divorced from ground realities. This media-manufactured ignorance risks catastrophic policy mistakes by misreading Iranian society and underestimating regime resilience.

Current and Former Iranian Political Prisoners' Perspectives Regarding Israel and the June 2025 War

by Alborz Ghandehari / University of Utah / a.ghandehari@utah.edu

I explore reactions of current and former Iranian political prisoners, and civil resistance leaders outside prison aligned with them, to Israel's actions in the region, leading up to and following its "Twelve Day War" on Iran. In the two years before the war, some political prisoners with varying persuasions, including journalist Elahe Mohammadi, writer Atefeh Rangriz, and Nobel laureate Narges Mohammadi, had to varying degrees condemned Israel's violence in Gaza. Elahe Mohammadi and Rangriz went further and expressed solidarity with Palestinians in their decades-long struggle against Israeli occupation, with Rangriz condemning Israel's genocide in Gaza in a message recorded from prison. During the Twelve Day War, which included a deadly attack on Evin prison where many activists were held, most prominent political prisoners and allies in their networks condemned Israel as a foreign aggressor. These voices included Varisheh Moradi, the Kurdish civil rights leader sentenced to execution, as well as Mehraveh Khandan, daughter of prisoner Reza Khandan and formerly incarcerated human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh. Further research is needed to analyze these social activists' perspectives on Israel in relation to those of the broader populace in Iran. For this roundtable, however, I explore audio, video, and written messages by incarcerated people and allied activists, and argue that two narratives emerge. The first uses liberal human rights discourses

to condemn both Israel and Iran as gross human rights violators. The second offers a more internationalist social justice view, seeing the struggle to be free from the Iranian state's oppression as part of a broader struggle for liberation from interconnected oppressions globally, whether in the form of authoritarianism, genocide, occupation, colonialism, or foreign imperialism. Some among the latter emphasize resistance to both the Iranian state's oppression, and to U.S. and Israeli efforts to co-opt Iran's movements for projects of imperialism and occupation.

15:45 – 16:00

Coffee Break

16:00-18:00 Janskerkhof 2/3

Room 0.13

106. Revisiting Hedayat 3: His Works in Cultural Context

Chair: Michael Beard, Nasrin Rahimieh

Arguably the most renowned modern Iranian writer, Sadeq Hedayat and his works, particularly his novel, The Blind Owl, have been widely studied. Nonetheless his works continue to generate debate and discussion about his contributions to modern Persian fiction and his place in world literature. 2026 marks the 90th anniversary of the publication of The Blind Owl and the 75th anniversary of Sadeq Hedayat's suicide in Paris. The three consecutive panels we propose for the Fifteenth Biennial Conference of Iranian Studies commemorate these occasions by showcasing recent and innovative scholarship on Hedayat. Bringing together established and emerging scholars, the panels examine not only Hedayat's literary works but also his drawings.

One panel will focus on visualization in Hedayat's art and fiction. The four panelists will consider Hedayat's work as painter and his visual experimentation, the covers and illustrations that accompany his works, and his use of Persian visual motifs.

A second panel will revisit The Blind Owl, its enigmatic title and the representation of abraded eyes, how surrealism might be configured in the novel, and how the dynamics of forgetting and remembrance magnify the uncanny quality of the narration. It will also analyze a new English translation of his novel and its difficult navigation between fidelity and fluency.

A third panel will focus on specific cultural contexts in (of? affecting?) Hedayat's works. The panelists will examine the question of peripheral modernity shaping his artistic forms, Hedayat's imagined India and his encounters with the Parsi community in India, his shifting nationalism, and his interests in anthropology that intersected with conceptualizations of race.

Historicizing Hedayat: Archaeotopia to Shitopia

by Mohamd Tavakoli-Targhi / Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi is Professor of Historical Studies, History, and Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations at the University of Toronto / m.tavakoli@utoronto.ca

In his early works, Sadiq Hidayat (1903-1951) blamed the Arabs for destroying Iran's ancient glory. He described them as corruptors of pure Iranian blood, who, through miscegenation, left behind "filthy Semites" (kisaftha-yi Sami), held responsible for spreading "cheating, treason, thievery, and bribery." While in his early writings, Hidayat used history to support a particularistic Aryan Iran, later in his life, he depicted "the spiritually sealed Iran" (Iran-i Minu nashan) as a "stinkistan/Shitopia" (gandistan). He had irreverently remarked, "We have a cesspit-like homeland [vatan] . . ." This paper explores and explains this conceptual shift in Hidayat's view of Iran and the Iranians.

Revisiting Realism: Hedayat and the Anthropological Orientation of Persian Fiction

by Amy Motlagh / UC Davis / amotlagh@ucdavis.edu

Sadeq Hedayat (1903-1951) is widely extolled in criticism as the cultural figure most foundational to the development of the forms of realism that characterized twentieth-century literature in Iran. Hedayat was also keenly interested in documenting Iranian folklore, and has been recognized during his lifetime as the foremost modernist writer of Iran and a proponent of folkloric study and preservation. However, this interest was riven with contradictions and underwritten with a belief in the Aryanist idea that Iranians were in fact a superior race that had been tainted by contact with Arab-Islamic civilizations. Although Hedayat's writings were largely focused on urban milieus, his successors transplanted his methods onto a variety of rural and littoral contexts. They were particularly interested in the Iranian South as a fertile site for anthropological writing of various kinds. These Iranian author-creators and their contemporaries were deeply engaged in folklore and ethnography, both of which have historically been mobilized in the promotion of nationalist racial thinking in many contexts. The folklorist impulse persisted well into the twentieth century, inspiring subsequent generations to "discover" and "preserve" indigenous Iranian cultures. This paper examines how a modern national Iranian identity and literature was forged by Hedayat and his successors through the movement to realistically present society as well as to "preserve culture" (i.e., to collect folklore and other ethnographic miscellany).

The Formal Aestheticization of Peripheral Modernity Hedayat's Fiction

by Omid Azadibougar / N/A / oazadib@gmail.com

This paper argues that in order to read Hedayat's work, particularly his fiction, as the artistic craft of form, it is imperative to approach his work as informed by the factors that define peripheral modernity. This, I argue, defines the Iranian condition and was discovered and coded in form by Hedayat early on. In other words, readings of Hedayat would be flawed if form, as a central discursive and aesthetic element, is not integral to analysis; and to understand and analyze his formal constructs, his work cannot be appreciated with the criteria suitable to the analysis of art forms embedded in capitalist progress. To showcase the constructive role of peripheral modernity in Hedayat's fiction, I will draw on 'Tup Morvari' and a short story, "Bon-Bast [Dead-End]" to display the complexity of Hedayat's formal constructs as well as the key role of peripheral modernity in shaping his fictional forms.

Weaving Indian Cultural Nuances into Persian Modernism in Sadegh Hedayat's Works

by Nadeem Akhtar / Faculty of Persian / nadeem.arm@gmail.com

Sadegh Hedayat, a prominent figure in modern Persian literature, significantly enriched his works by weaving Indian motifs, customs, and cultural elements into his narratives, opening new avenues in Persian literary studies. His engagement with Indian culture began early in his career, long before his direct encounter with India in 1936, shaping his unique narrative style. Drawing inspiration from French orientalist travelogues, particularly those of Pierre Loti, Hedayat crafted an imagined India that blended seamlessly with Persian literary traditions. These sources provided vivid depictions of Indian customs, mythology, and societal nuances, which he adapted to explore themes of existentialism and cultural identity.

Hedayat's early works reflect a fascination with Indian aesthetics and philosophy, evident in his use of motifs that evoke India's rich cultural tapestry. This indirect approach, rooted in literary rather than experiential knowledge, allowed him to create a distinctive fusion of Persian and Indian elements. His seminal work, Buf-e Kur (The Blind Owl), subtly incorporates Indian mystical and philosophical undertones, enhancing its psychological and atmospheric depth. This blending of cultures underscores Hedayat's ability to transcend geographical boundaries, creating narratives that resonate universally while remaining grounded in specific cultural contexts.

His 1936 visit to India marked a pivotal moment, as firsthand exposure to the country's vibrant culture and interactions with the Indian Parsi community added authenticity and nuance to his later works. These encounters provided insights into the Parsis' customs and challenges, enriching his portrayals of cultural dynamics. Hedayat's integration of Indian elements not only broadened the scope of Persian literature but also contributed to a cross-cultural dialogue, highlighting the potential for literary synthesis in modernist writing. His legacy lies in his innovative approach, which continues to inspire discussions on cultural interconnectedness in literature.

Room 0.17

107. Calligraphy and the Collective Consciousness: Reimagining the Nastaʿlīq script as a Cultural Vector

Chair: Pouya Jahanshahi

This interdisciplinary panel approaches Nastaʿlīq not merely as calligraphy but as a cultural vector that has shaped the aesthetic and intellectual life of the Persianate world. Across art history, design, linguistics, and media studies, the presenters reveal how this script operates as a vessel of collective consciousness—carrying political, poetic, and visual meanings across time and media.

The first paper establishes a historical framework by investigating how Nastaʿlīq evolved from a scribal style to a marker of collective identity within Iran and the broader Persianate domain. The second explores its afterlife in the realm of Iranian graphic design, charting the possibilities – as well as limitations – of rendering Nastaʿlīq within contemporary digital tools and typographic systems. The third situates the script within the wider genealogy of Arabic scripts, identifying the emergence of an "eastern mode" that reflected regional aesthetics and linguistic structures. Lastly, the fourth paper turns to the domain of the moving image, demonstrating how the unique medium of film can serve as an interpretive tool to visualize and democratize the story of Nastaʿlīq for contemporary audiences.

Through this cross-disciplinary dialogue, the panel asks how a script born in the fifteenth century continues to mediate the boundaries between heritage and innovation. It proposes Nastaʿlīq as a medium of thought—a dynamic, evolving structure through which Persianate collective consciousness is continually rewritten.

Form, Language, and Identity: Nastaʿlīq and the Eastern Tradition of Arabic Script

by Amirmahdi Moslehi / University of Hamburg / amir.moslehi@studium.uni-hamburg.de

In the centuries following the rise of Islam, as the Arabic script spread across the vast territories of the Islamic world, it experienced significant formal and structural transformations shaped by regional geographies and cultural traditions. Among the most important of these developments was the emergence of Nastaʿlīq in the fifteenth century, a calligraphic style created to meet the specific needs of Persian writing. Originally devised for the transcription of classical Persian literature, Nastaʿlīq gradually replaced earlier scripts such as Naskh and Rayḥān, which had been primarily suited to Arabic linguistic structures.

This lecture examines how the emergence of Nastaʿlīq gave rise to two distinct modes of Arabic-script writing: the eastern, associated with Persianate lands, and the western, associated with the Arab world and the Ottoman Empire. It explores how the fluid nature and compositional flexibility of Nastaʿlīq reflected broader linguistic, cultural, and political characteristics of the eastern Islamic world. By analyzing the formal features of Persian and Arabic texts, this study argues that the adaptability of Nastaʿlīq not only defined the visual identity of Persianate culture but also helped shape what may be called the "eastern style" of Arabic script, a distinct visual language that embodied regional identity and artistic innovation.

Performing Beauty: A Filmmaker's Journey with Nastaʿlīq

by Mehran Haghighi / Homa Films / haghighimehran@yahoo.com
This presentation reflects on the making of Performing Beauty | سماع قلم, a feature-length documentary devoted to the art, spirit, and cultural presence of the Nastaʿlīq script. Rather than producing a didactic film that explains how calligraphy is practiced, my intention was to create a cinematic experience that allows audiences to feel the rhythm, balance, and beauty of Nastaʿlīq as it lives within Persian culture.
The film traces the script's creation and development, the refinement of its rules, and its evolving role in Iranian artistic and spiritual life. It combines interviews with master calligraphers, poets, and scholars with carefully composed images, sound, and music, presenting technical and historical elements through a poetic lens. In this sense, the film performs Nastaʿlīq rather than describing it—translating its fluid lines and meditative structure into cinematic form.
Although the project began with a different structure in mind, unforeseen circumstances during production and post-production required me to take on the roles of director, writer, editor, and music director. The film's final form emerged organically during editing, guided by an intuition of presence more than by a predetermined plan. Cultural roots of Nastaʿlīq can fade or be rewritten. I felt the need to mark Nastaʿlīq's Persian foundation—not through argument, but through lineage, context, and lived testimony.
Performing Beauty is conceived as a part of a series of seven films exploring Persian artistic traditions—calligraphy, rug-weaving, classical music, painting, architecture, literature, and cuisine—each seeking to evoke, rather than define, what is Persian.

Nasta'liq and Persianate Consciousness? Evidence and Narratives
by Seyed Abdolreza Hosseini / University of Vienna / abdr.hosseini@gmail.com
The Nasta'liq style holds a privileged place in the history of Persian art. Born in the Persianate world, it achieved profound and enduring popularity across and beyond Persian-speaking lands and cultures. The central question of this study is not merely whether Nasta'liq was a feature of a pre-modern and modern collective consciousness, but rather how, when, and by whom it was transformed into a collective signifier. Was this role engineered by political intellectuals, promoted by master calligraphers, imposed by ruling elites, or cultivated by popular taste? To answer this, the investigation traces the evolution of the relationship between Nasta'liq and collective consciousness in Iran and the broader Persianate world from the style's inception.
By treating the style as a robust body of objective evidence and contextualizing the nattatives around it, this analysis reveals the historiography of Nasta'liq, exposing moments where its pre-modern history was reframed to serve the politics of memory of a later time. This will recover the style's internal evolution and its role in other forms of Persianate consciousness, which were obscured when it was reduced to a symbol for a modern nation.
Consequently, this research contributes not only to the history of art and calligraphy but also to the contentious debates within Iranian political thought regarding the nature of collective identity. It examines the roles of the state, cultural elites, and social institutions in shaping different forms of Persianate consciousness, using the narrative and material lens of a specific style.

Typographic Poetics: Nastalique and the aesthetics Iranian Graphic Design
by Pouya Jahanshahi / Oklahoma State University / pjahans@okstate.edu
This paper examines the enduring influence of the Nastaʿlīq script on the evolution of Iranian graphic design from the mid-20th century to the digital age. More than a typographic style, Nastaʿlīq functions as a cultural and aesthetic continuum linking classical calligraphic heritage with contemporary visual communication. The study traces how Iranian designers have engaged with this

script as both inspiration and challenge—honoring its visual poetry while adapting it to the structural demands of modern print and screen-based media.
By analyzing case studies of branding, poster design, and digital typography, the paper explores how Nastaʿlīq's distinctive rhythm and curvature have been reinterpreted through emerging technologies. It also highlights the ongoing struggle to digitize Nastaʿlīq authentically, as designers seek ways to translate its calligraphic dynamism into typographic systems. This inquiry underscores Nastaʿlīq's continuing role as a visual marker of Iranian identity and artistic innovation in the age of digital design.

Room 0.19

108. Studies in Early Modern Persian Literature

Chair: Shaahin Pishbin

Long cast as an era of decline and decadence following the close of the "classical" canon, the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries are now increasingly recognised as a period of extraordinary creativity in which Persian literature achieved remarkable geographic and social reach. Yet much remains to be done to understand the literary developments of this period, its textual culture, and the contributions of its many luminaries.
This panel contributes to this ongoing process of redress, approaching the literature of the Safavid and Mughal worlds through distinct but overlapping lenses. Our first two papers highlight the aesthetic and cultural forces that shaped seventeenth-century verse: one examines the centrality of astonishment (ḥayrat) in the ghazals of the Safavid poet Jalāl Asīr and his successors, while another analyses Ashraf Māzandarānī's masnavī on the Hindu festival of Holi as a case study in poetic negotiation of mobility and cultural encounter. The second pair of papers turn to the manuscript archive to reconsider the transmission and textuality of early modern dīvāns. One argues that the variability of Ṣāʾib Tabrīzī's dīvān across manuscript recensions is suggestive of how the poems themselves cultivate reading practices of reassembly and reconfiguration. The other revisits the compilation and afterlife of Fayẓī Fayyāẓī's Tabāshīr al-ṣubḥ, testing long-standing theories about the poet's exact role in shaping his oeuvre.
Taken together, these papers–two focused on poets who travelled to India and two on poets who remained rooted in their respective homelands–highlight how critical attention to transregional mobility, aesthetic experimentation, vocabularies of emotion, and the contingencies of manuscript culture offer productive ways forward for our understanding of early modern Persian poetry. In doing so, the panel underscores the significance of this period and its central place in the longer history of Persian literature.

The School of Astonishment: Ḥayrat in the Seventeenth-Century Persian ghazal

by Shaahin Pishbin / University of Oxford / shaahin.pishbin@queens.ox.ac.uk

The Persian ghazal underwent remarkable experimentation in the seventeenth century, prompting scholars to devise various frameworks for making sense of its transformations. Some approaches have emphasized stylistic schools linked to place–such as the so-called "Indian style" or the Isfahani school–while others have explored the explanatory potential of emic categories like shīva-yi tāza (the fresh style) or khayāl-bandī (image-making poetry). Still others have charted networks of poetic exchange and influence by tracing chains of imitation (javābs) across different authors. This paper proposes a different lens: focusing on how a single word and emotion, ḥayrat (astonishment, bewilderment), became a defining concern for several leading ghazal poets of the period.
Long valorised in Islamic intellectual and mystical traditions as the state of awe-stricken perplexity that befalls true believers before divine mystery, ḥayrat took on new literary life in the Safavid capital of Isfahan under Shāh ʿAbbās I. There, poets began to experiment with its rhetorical and affective potential, coalescing into what may be called a "school of astonishment"–a lyric movement that

elevated bewilderment into a poetic and spiritual ideal. Central to this development was the oeuvre of Jalāl Asīr (d. ca. 1648), a prominent Safavid poet who remained in Iran and crafted a sustained poetics of astonishment in his ghazals.
By examining Asīr's treatment of ḥayrat, and by tracing how his innovations were adapted and expanded by contemporaries such as Ṣāʾib of Tabriz (d. 1692) and Bīdil of Delhi (d. 1725), this paper demonstrates how a shared emotional vocabulary shaped transregional Persian lyric production. More broadly, it argues that attending to the cultivation of ḥayrat allows us to see seventeenth-century ghazal experimentation not only as a matter of stylistic novelty but also as a deeply affective and devotional project.

The Mutable Ghazal: Qahramān's Edition of Divān-e Sā'eb and the Manuscript Archive
by Paul E Losensky / Paul Losensky (Ph.D. University of Chicago, 1993) is Professor Emeritus in the Department of Central Eurasian Studies and the Department of Comparative Literature at Indiana University, Bloomington / plosensk@indiana.edu
Few scholars have contributed as much to the study of early modern Persian poetry than the meticulous and indefatigable editor Mohammad Qahramān. His definitive editions of the works of poets such as Kalim Kāshāni and Qodsi Mashhadi made available a body of poetry that had hitherto lain sequestered in rare, hard-to-access manuscripts and lithographs. Qahramān's weightiest work, literally and figuratively, is his edition of Divān-e Sā'eb published in six volumes between 1985 and 1991. Unlike his other editions, which are based on one or two authoritative source manuscripts, Divān-e Sā'eb is an eclectic edition, drawing on some twenty manuscripts to compile its collection of over 7,000 ghazals. Qahramān's edition offers the first comprehensive record of the scope and variety of Sā'eb's oeuvre but gives little sense of the diversity and mutability of the manuscript archive. Each manuscript contains a different selection of poems. While there are relatively few textual variants within individual verses, the number and order of verses within the ghazal can vary widely. Comparing Qahramān's edition with several manuscripts of the divān that Sā'eb personally examined, this paper argues that this variability demonstrates not simply the self-sufficiency of the individual verse but also its capacity to enter into various networks of relation within the ghazal. Readers are often invited to assemble new poetic wholes by arranging and re-arranging verses linked by shared formal features. This open mutability of arrangement complements and sometimes contests the tight logic and closure for which Sā'eb's individual tak beyts are justly renowned.

Holi in Safavid Verse: Ashraf-i Māzandarānī's Poetic Negotiation of Cultural Encounter
by Shahla Farghadani / University of Michigan, Ann Arbor / sfarghad@umich.edu
This paper explores "The Praise and Disgrace of Holi" (Dar taʿrīf va mazammat-i Holi), a masnavī by the seventeenth-century poet Ashraf-i Māzandarānī (d. 1704). Trained in Safavid Isfahan and later serving at the Mughal court of Aurangzeb, Ashraf navigated the cultural landscapes between Iran and India, offering a unique perspective on mobility within the Persianate world. In this poem, he depicts the Indian spring festival of Holi, utilizing Persian literary conventions to convey a sense of both fascination and discomfort. His verses render the ritual accessible to a Persian audience while highlighting its cultural distinctiveness, especially regarding its social and aesthetic dimensions. By situating Ashraf's poem within the context of early modern Persian poetry, I argue that mobility significantly influenced literary practices in the seventeenth-century Persianate world. Unlike poets who were solely rooted in Iran or India, Ashraf engaged with cross-cultural encounters through his poetic form. His work exemplifies how Persian poetry served not only as an aesthetic endeavor but also as a means of interpreting foreign rituals, articulating identity, and delineating cultural boundaries.

The dawn of Fayḍī's dīwān: The making of Tabāshīr al-ṣubḥ

by Thibaut D Hubert / Thibaut d'Hubert (PhD and habilitation EPHE, Paris) is Research associate in the Institut für Indologie und Tibetologie at LMU in Munich / th.dhubert@gmail.com

What is left of Fayḍī Fayyāḍī (d. 1595)'s works gives the impression of an unfinished monument. His oeuvre displays a commitment to institutionalized literary forms, as well as a spirit of experimentation through a display of stylistic virtuosity and a creative engagement with past traditions. As emperor Akbar's malik al-shuʿarā, he started the project of composing a quintet of narrative poems, and, following the example of Amīr Khusraw (d. 1325), he compiled what was meant to be the first of a series of several dīwāns. The dīwān is titled Tabāshīr al-ṣubḥ (The White Rays of Dawn). Even if the title suggests that this work was meant to inaugurate his lyric oeuvre, it is the only selection of his own poetry that he left to us. A closer look at the available manuscripts of the dīwān tells us a slightly more complex story. In a seminal article on Fayḍī's life and works published in 1963, Z.A. Desai formulated the theory of three versions of the dīwān: two versions - a short (6000 verses) one and a long (9000 verses) one - compiled by Fayḍī himself, and an even longer one (12000 verses) compiled after his death. After Desai, several scholars discussed problems surrounding the transmission of the dīwān and issues with the text established by Arshad in his edition (Lahore, 1967). A new survey of the available manuscripts of Fayḍī's dīwān and the study of some of the earliest witnesses make it possible to test the validity of Desai's theory. Moreover, since Desai's pioneering work, a substantial body of scholarship on the poet, the context that surrounded his literary career, and the reception of his works allows us to refine our critical lens when assessing the changes that may have occurred through the various reworkings of his dīwān.

Room 0.21

109. Propaganda and Cultural Diplomacy in Pahlavi and Post-Revolutionary Iran

Chair: Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, Dmitry Asinovskiy

In the era of the Global Cold War, most states employed a variety of methods to exercise soft power towards their adversaries, allies, and regions of interest. The most popular among those methods included cultural diplomacy and covert foreign propaganda as vehicles for self-promotion and subversive influence. Iran, as a country that lived in the shadow of the Cold War, could not avoid being involved in these transnational activities. Moreover, in Iran, these processes often operated in both directions. The country was an object of competing cultural influences and covert propaganda campaigns, and simultaneously sought to project its own image abroad both before and after the 1978-79 Revolution.

Papers that form this panel seek to underscore Iran's role as both the initiator and the object of cultural diplomacy and covert propaganda. Our first presenter will investigate how Iranian folklore, and specifically the image of Molla Nasreddin, was employed in several campaigns of cultural diplomacy, including its use by the United States Information Agency (USIA) to promote anti-communism in Iran. Our second presenter will use a case study of several Arabic-language journals published under the authority of post-revolutionary Iran. He will highlight the attempts of the Iranian regime to promote the revolutionary message and Islamize the anti-imperialist movements in the Arab world. Our third presenter's talk will focus on Soviet cultural diplomacy and propaganda in Iran during the first years after the 1978-79 Revolution. He will discuss how these campaigns were launched out of a desperate need to justify Soviet support for Ayatollah Khomeini as an anti-imperialist figure, despite growing anti-Sovietism in the Iranian regime's rhetoric and actions. Our fourth presenter will further develop the topic of Soviet propaganda in the post-revolutionary period, focusing on the 1980s. He will reveal some of the methods used by Soviet state agencies and tolerated by the Islamist authorities of Iran, such as planting content in Iranian media and supplying the materials for the overhaul of the Iranian educational system and cultural sphere.

Failing Attempts at Fixing Iranian Anti-Imperialism. Soviet Cultural Diplomacy and Propaganda Efforts in the Islamic Republic (1979-1983).

by Dmitry Asinovskiy / Tel Aviv University / dasinovskiy@gmail.com

In November 1979, Soviet Ambassador to Iran, Vladimir Vinogradov, wrote to the head of the Central Committee's Foreign Information department, Leonid Zamiatin, that "the hopes that Iran's ideological climate might have shifted to the left did not materialize." According to Vinogradov, the progressive course of Iran's revolutionary transformation was undermined not only by "the forces hostile to Marxist-Leninist ideology that had operated in pre-revolutionary Iran" but also by "new elements from the conservative right wing of clergy and religious fanatics." Therefore, he proposed countering these hostile activities by intensifying the Soviet Union's efforts in propaganda and cultural diplomacy.

For many Soviet officials, the anti-Sovietism of post-revolutionary Iran was an aberration that was inspired by "reactionary elements" within an otherwise "objectively progressive" regime. They viewed the Iranian Revolution as an anti-imperialist movement led by a progressive leader, Ayatollah Khomeini. However, even before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan that highlighted the anti-Sovietism of Khomeini's regime, there were many signs that the anti-imperialism of the Islamic Republic was directed against the Soviet Union as much as against the United States. This paper discusses how cultural diplomacy and propaganda activities involving several Soviet institutions – from the Societies of Friendship to the Official Muftiate – were used by proponents of Soviet support for Ayatollah Khomeini's regime to desperately counter the influence of "hostile reactionary elements" within post-revolutionary Iran. The paper also discusses how these attempts failed to achieve even marginal success. While much of this failure stemmed from incorrect assumptions about the anti-imperialist fraternity with Khomeini's Iran, the campaign also failed due to poor execution. Investigating this campaign at the level of individuals and institutions on the ground, this paper unveils why and how Soviet attempts at cultural diplomacy and propaganda in post-revolutionary Iran proved unsuccessful.

Politics of Iranian Folklore: From Molla Nasreddin to the USIA

by Perin Gurel / University of Notre Dame / pgurel@nd.edu

Drawing on multilingual print archives, oral humor collections, and US diplomatic records, this paper examines the transnational politics of Iranian folklore through the figure of Molla Nasreddin (AKA Nasreddin Hoja), tracing his journey from early twentieth-century anti-colonial satire to Cold War propaganda. Beginning with the Azerbaijani-language journal Molla Nasreddin (1906–1911), which reimagined Hoja as a modern trickster critiquing clerical hypocrisy, patriarchy, and imperialism, the study situates the comic sage within the region's dissident print culture, where Hoja jokes circulated across Persian- and Turkic-speaking publics. Half a century later, the same folkloric icon reappeared in a radically different guise: between 1953 and 1958, the United States Information Agency (USIA) produced twenty-four Hoja marionette films under the supervision of Mehmed A. Simsar, a Tabriz-born linguist and filmmaker educated in Istanbul. These short films—intended for audiences in West and South Asia—translated vernacular humor into anti-communist moral theater. By replacing the trickster's ambivalent irony with didactic lessons on faith, family, and docile Muslim manliness, Simsar's Hoja embodied an "American Islam" that cast religion as the antidote to communism. By juxtaposing Molla Nasreddin's revolutionary satire with the USIA's pious puppetry, this article reveals how folklore's adaptability made it a contested medium of ideological instruction.

The USSR and the Islamic "Cultural Revolution" in Iran: Exporting Anti-Imperialism

by Siarhei Bohdan / University of Regensburg / zmysla@yahoo.com

After the 1979 Islamic revolution, the new Iranian authorities declared hostility to all superpowers and started a fight against Western cultural and educational influence in the country. However, concurrently, in the 1980s, they regularly sought Soviet cultural and educational expertise and products, which were eagerly supplied to them by Moscow and served as a substitute for Western analogues. Moreover, the revolutionary regime at least tolerated Soviet-promoted and -planted content in Iranian media that counted dozens of articles every month, which were published or broadcast even in mainstream Iranian media. Using Soviet archival records, this article uncovers the lesser-known imported sources of Iran's Islamic "Cultural Revolution" and anti-imperialist discourse and highlights the role of lower-level institutions in the international relations of radical actors.

Capturing the Conference Circuit, Translating the Revolution: The Role of Iranian Arabic Language Journals in Promoting the Islamic Republic in the Early 1980s

by Simon Wolfgang Fuchs / The Hebrew University of Jerusalem / simonw.fuchs@mail.huji.ac.il

My presentation focuses on three Iranian Arabic Language journals, published in the early 1980s. Al-Shahid, Sawt al-Umma (Voice of the Islamic Community) and Sawt al-Wahda al-Islamiyya (Voice of Islamic Unity) aimed at promoting the Iranian revolutionary message in the Arab Middle East, North Africa, and beyond. The periodicals featured interviews with foreign guests, both individuals and groups, such as liberation movements, fellow Islamists, or European leftists, who often came to Iran in conjunction with major conferences. At the same time, these journals also prominently covered Iranian efforts to attend gatherings and conferences abroad, such as when Hadi Khosroshahi (d. 2020) delivered a forceful portrayal of Islam's mobilizing energy and its progressive character at the 14th Conference on Islamic Thought in Algiers in September 1980. I am interested in how these journals packaged the Revolution to Arabic-speaking audiences, how they incorporated and deflected criticism of events unfolding in Iran and how much effort they spent in advocating for new understandings of Muslim womanhood. Similarly, I also pay attention to the readership, tracing letters to the editors submitted from North Africa, Europe, Sub Saharan Africa and the Middle East. Foreign guests who made an appearance in these three journals lauded the Iranian attempts at returning to an "authentic" version of Islam and shared their own experiences in how to defeat leftist ideologies or what would be the best way forward to Islamize the struggle over Palestine.

Room 0.22

110. Persianate Women in Unexpected Spaces: Sensing Presence and Power

Chair: Amanda Leong

Across the Persianate world, from the Mughal to Qajar empires, to twentieth-century Afghanistan, women appear in at times unexpected spaces of power, influence, and play. This panel positions 'the unexpected' as a lens through which to re-examine the archives of female power. We argue that paying close analytical attention to the sensorial and affective realms in which these women appear reveals how women at times purposefully placed themselves in certain contexts that have been seen as more male-dominated in order to affect change, create legacy, and shift understandings of women's presence, embodiment, and ability. The contexts in which we examine the appearance of these women is both unexpected in terms of how those spaces have traditionally been seen by both scholars, as well as by the women's contemporaries. From women using literature to teach elite men and other women to build innovative architectural structures in the Mughal world, to a Queen Mother in Qajar Iran affecting power through expressing advice and sentiments to shape governing and political decisions in her letters, to Qajar women appearing on playing cards and shifting meanings of certain conceptions of womanhood, to women in Afghanistan becoming figures of authority in Sufi circles, this panel brings together cases from around the Persianate world through the shared lens of the unexpected. Each paper pays close attention to senses and affects in their

respective archives and bodies of sources, recovering manifestations of women's power and presence in places where it has often been overlooked.

"Interfering in Men's Affairs:" A Qajar Queen Mother and Her Affective Power
by Belle Cheves / University of Arizona / bcheves@gmail.com
In a letter Mahd-e 'Ulya wrote to her son, Nasir al-Din Shah (r. 1848-1896), in the early 1860s, she notes that he of all people should know she interferes more in the affairs of men than those of women. Many of the extant letters that the queen mother wrote to her son in the mid-Qajar era present warm tones of care and concern for her son's well-being, and update him on various familial goings on. This letter, however, devoid of warmth, affects a sense of dominance and control. This unexpected projection of power over the king, absent from most of Mahd-e 'Ulya's letters to him, presents a unique window into how the Queen Mother asserted power and inserted herself into her son's decision-making. An affective reading of this letter, combined with attention to the emotional nuances of other letters she wrote to Nasir al-Din Shah on similar topics, reveal how Mahd-e 'Ulya mobilized her position and subtly (or in the case of this letter, explicitly) exerted influence over the Qajar court during periods of governing and financial upheaval in the mid nineteenth century. Though the role of Mahd-i 'Ulya has been addressed by some scholars in passing, particularly during the early moments of Nasir al-Din Shah's ascent to the throne, this paper focuses on the ways in which she regularly maintained senses of power and control.

"Do they have such umbrella-shaped tents and arches?": Recovering and Teaching Early Mughal Women's Architectural Accomplishments
by Amanda Leong / The Courtauld Institute of Art / ahoodiejeans94@gmail.com
The Humayunnamah by Gulbadan Begum (1523–1603) has been overlooked by scholars as a valuable source for recovering various royal women's contributions to ephemeral architecture in the early Mughal context that left no surviving physical structure. Beyond using the Humayunnamah to highlight women's roles in ephemeral architecture, this article also uncovers early Mughal kings' women-centered architectural initiatives and sheds light on Gulbadan's 'unexpected' architectural accomplishments. It examines how she uses sensory details, space, and emotions in her writing to shape the Humayunnamah into a 'mirror for princes and princesses', instructing architectural knowledge from a female perspective. This provides a new lens to understand female power and gender dynamics in the early Mughal world. An illustration from Akbarnamah commissioned by Gulbadan's sister-in-law, Hamidah Begum (1527–1604), will be explored in conversation with Gulbadan's Humayunnamah, in addition to illustrations from an Akbarnamah that belonged to Mughal emperor Akbar (1542–1605). By integrating visual and textual sources from female and male members from the same ruling family that have not been studied together before, my intermedial and 'intergender' approach in this article provides a method to understand the diverse ways in which royal and even non-elite women's architectural contributions in the early Mughal context were articulated.

The Androgyny of my Soul – Transcending Limitations in Afghanistan's Sufi Practice
by Annika Schmeding / NIOD Institute / annika.schmeding36@gmail.com
The connection between androgyny and female religious authority in Sufism initially appears unexpected and maybe as paradoxical. However, examining the history of nazar (contemplative gazing), androgynous practices in antinomian Sufism and Qawwali performance, and the metaphorical deployment of androgyny within Sufi circles reveals how historic and contemporary discourses of divine connection as a non-gendered spiritual practice have created new possibilities for female leadership. This talk traces the historic roots and ongoing conversation of female authority

within a contemporary Qadirriyah Sufi community in Afghanistan in which women not only practice but also teach zikr. While drawing on similar aspects of Sufi knowledge as their male counterparts, female teachers navigated restrictive norms that limit women within Islamic leadership positions. In the literature on contemporary Afghanistan women are rarely considered Muslim actors who contribute to shaping or formulating Islamic practices and discourses - they are mainly depicted as victims of conservative Islamic discourses and restrictions. This portrayal of Islamic injunctions and a religiously sanctioned patriarchal system that women either need to endure or fight against encapsulates two aspects of erasure: it narrows Islam to a definition of orthodoxy or tradition that excludes different variants, and it silences women as religious actors in their own right. Taking a community-centered view illustrates that a female leader's agency was embedded in the community's strong ethos of male allyship and anchored in the theoretical positioning of the Sufi path as a non-gendered endeavor of the soul - that enabled the inclusion of female Sufi students and teachers. The talk will explore how the recourse to the sensorial and affective realms of the spiritual psychophysiological organ of the heart allowed the transcendence of social categories and the establishment of female authority.

The Bibi of Pentacles: Playing Cards, Touch, and the Erotic Female Body in Qajar Visual Culture
by Natasha Morris / SOAS / nm89@soas.ac.uk
A chance encounter with the 'unexpected Persianate' prompts this paper's examination of the intersection of embodiment, tactile spaces, and the symbolic female figure in a juxtaposition of playing card iconography and Qajar visual culture. Multimedia artist Julia Popescu chose to use the Qajar oil painting entitled Girl with Mirror in the collection of the Art Museum of Georgia (c.1810) as source material for her evocative illustration of the 'Queen of Pentacles' card in Gabriela Herstik's 'Goddess of Love' tarot deck. The nineteenth-century concubine is transfigured and transformed by this application: in her new context, she is elevated to a 'queen' of one of the four suits of the minor arcana, a very different status from how her contemporaries would have been part of the lakkat (whore/dancer) suite of the traditional Persian card game of as nas. This re-interpretation of Qajar art prompts further questions about how the female body might traverse cross-cultural associations, both retaining and losing value between cultural registers of high and low art, but maintaining an association with being touched and handled. To make sense of the social and sensory environment that Qajar women and their painted likenesses were both fetishised within, yet physically ostracised from, this paper draws on moral tracts from the period, including Ta'dib al-niswan (Disciplining of Women) and the bitingly satirical response Ma'ayib al-rijal (Vices of Men), written by Bibi Khanum Astarabadi in 1894. By weaving together card iconography, Qajar visual and material culture, and theories of touch, space, and embodiment, The Bibi of Pentacles illuminates how female erotic symbolism operates across genres and hierarchies—how bodies are played with, played for, and materially inscribed.

Room 1.09

111. Translation and Multilingualism in the Jewish-Iranian World

Chair: Jonathan Brack

How did multilingual practices shape the way Iranian Jews navigated their predominantly Muslim environment? What roles did translation, transliteration, and polyglotism play in sustaining Persian-speaking Jewish communities and their traditions? Through four case studies spanning nearly a millennium, this panel will explore how translation practices, linguistic registers, multilingual competencies, and cross-cultural and inter-religious exchanges shaped Jewish-Iranian identities, social relations, intellectual encounters, and everyday life. The panel will show how language served simultaneously as a marker of communal identity and boundary mechanism, and as the nexus of intellectual, religious, and cultural transmission, both within and beyond the Jewish world.

Dennis Halft analyzes early modern Judeo-Persian Bible translations as windows into Jewish communal life and Jewish-Shiite relations. Ali B. Langroudi explores key textual and theoretical questions related to Aramaism in early Judeo-Persian biblical versions. Jonathan Brack examines the role of Hebrew at the medieval Mongol court, where a Jewish convert to Islam engaged with his Jewish past while situating Hebrew and Jewish history in the Mongols' Eurasian knowledge exchange. Finally, Ariane Sadjed shifts the panel's focus to the modern period and from 'high culture' to everyday life of Jewish women. Using Judeo-Persian writings of women, Sadjed studies fundamental questions related to gender, literacy, and multilingualism in the Iranian Jewish world. The panel contributes to broader discussions about linguistic practices among minorities, intercultural exchange, and the role of translation in maintaining diasporic communities.

Writing Persian Jerusalem: Language in the Memoirs of Rafael Haim Hacohen

By Eirik Kvindesland / Post-doctoral researcher, Institute for Iranian Studies
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In the 1890s, a community of Persian Jews settled in late Ottoman Jerusalem. They established a small Iranian neighborhood outside the Old City, and soon integrated between Palestinian villages and a myriad other Jewish immigrant communities. The most vivid description of this period of community-building are the memoirs of Rafael Haim HaCohen. Born in Shiraz, he came to Jerusalem with his family at the age of eight, and grew up with the new community. Hacohen's memoir offers detailed insight into Iranian-Jewish life and the community's interactions with other cultures in late-Ottoman Jerusalem.

This paper studies the question of language in HaCohen's memoirs. While written in Hebrew, the text speaks of a social sphere of competing linguistic projects, revealing significant transitions at the turn of the 19th century. In the 1890s, Jerusalem was characterized by linguistic diversity, where Iranian Jews engaged in multiple spheres and spoke Arabic, Persian and Hebrew according to need. Yet, in the 20th century, and particularly in the 1910s, the community pivoted towards Hebrew, while at the same time preserving its Persian cultural distinctiveness. HaCohen himself was a major driver in these changes, through his establishment of a Hebrew-language press in 1912. His publishing activity came to serve as a focal point for Iranian-Jewish identity production in Jerusalem, while at the same guiding the community into a larger socio-linguistic sphere centered on modern Hebrew.

Writings of the Illiterate: Women as Creators of Judeo-Persian texts

by Ariane Sadjed / Institute for Iranian Studies, Austrian Academy of Sciences
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In accounts of 19th- and early 20th-century Iranian Jewish history, women are scarcely visible. Travelogues of diplomats, missonaries and adventurers hardly ever mention females; communal histories and memoirs were and are mostly written by men and do not feature women. Academic publications deal with the role of women as an exception, and largely follow the trend of priviledging written over oral history, „high" over „low" or popular culture, resulting in a widespread invisibility of women.

Regarding the question of literacy (and related questions concerning the knowledge of Hebrew), the general assumption is that only men knew how to read and write, while women were illiterate. In relation to religious liturgy, this conclusion might be justified. But Jewish life evolved in many other places, in which women were central figures. I will discuss two examples from my research in family archives that shed a rather unusual light on the role of Jewish women in Iran. Both examples were written in Judeo-Persian, in the early to mid 20th century. The first is a short memoir written by a lady from Mashhad, the second are letters from a woman in North-Western Iran to her travelling husband. Describing how they acquired literacy and managed family life, including financial and

judicial disputes, suggests that – while priviledged to a certain extent – these were not exceptions. Examining the legacies of women beyond high literature or formal religious leadership,my paper aims to expand some of the established notions about knowledge and cosmopolitanism.

Judeo-Persian Bible Translations and the Early Modern Jewish-Iranian World
by Dennis Halft / https://bit.ly/3QIqWTW / halft@uni-trier.de
A few years after his enthronement, Nādir Shāh Afshār (r. 1148/1736–1160/1747) aligned himself with the royal tradition of sponsoring translations of sacred texts. Following the precedent set by Shāh ʿAbbās and the Mughal emperors, he commissioned members of various religious communities, including Jews, Armenians, Catholic missionaries, and Muslims, to translate their scriptures into Persian. In this context, Bābāʾī ben Nūrīʾel, a rabbi from Kāshān, collaborated with other Jewish scholars to produce a Persian translation of the Psalms, and likely the Pentateuch, from Hebrew between 1740 and 1741. Drawing on a close analysis of the extant manuscript copies, most of which are written in Hebrew script, this paper examines the translation practices and multilingual competencies of these Jewish scholars. Given the limited archival material on Jewish communities in early modern Iran, this study highlights the value of Judeo-Persian Bible translations as sources for understanding the Jewish-Iranian world, particularly in relation to Jewish-Shiite interactions.

Aramaic Targumim and Judeo-Persian Bible
by Ali B. Langroudi / Leibniz Institute for Jewish History and Culture - Simon Dubnow, Leipzig / balaeilangroudi@dubnow.de
As early as the 1810s, scholars recognized the influence of Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Bible, known as Targumim (singular: Targum), on Judeo-Persian translations of the corresponding biblical texts. Although several references to the topic have been made in scholarly works, there has been no effort to classify these influences. This presentation addresses this gap in scholarship, arguing that Judeo-Persian translations of the Bible were affected by ancient Aramaic Targumim in two ways: textually and stylistically. Textually, they incorporate specific Aramaic readings that differ from the standard Hebrew Masoretic text. Stylistically, they follow various patterns known from Aramaic Targumim, e.g., avoiding anthropomorphism and providing a literary rendition of the biblical texts. The presentation begins with a historical overview of Aramaic and Judeo-Persian biblical texts. Then, it highlights the most notable publications related to the topic from 1813 to 2025, providing a history of scholarship in the field. Next, the argument will be analyzed, supported by various examples from different Judeo-Persian translations of biblical books. It will demonstrate how the study deepens our understanding of the development of Judeo-Persian versions of the Bible and enhances our knowledge of multilingualism and translation in Iranian Jewry. To conclude, the presentation will emphasize the patterns of influence of the Aramaic Targumim on Judeo-Persian translations.

Room 1.10

112. Persianate Banaras: An Untold Story of Early Modern Multilingualism

Chair: Ojaswini Shekawat

Renowned for Sanskrit knowledge production and being the sacred center of Brahmin intellectuals, Banaras (a city of countless names, popularly also known as Varanasi and Kashi) was slowly incorporated into the Mughal world starting in the late 16th century. It is understandable, then, that the scholarship on Banaras tells an incomplete story, focusing almost exclusively on Sanskrit sources and the architecture of Banaras. Rosalind O'Hanlon and Christopher Minkowski, among others, have written extensively about the networks of Brahman intellectuals from Banaras, their intellectual and political endeavors through which they positioned their city in the Mughal court to channel a consistent stream of patronage towards Banaras, while art historians like Madhuri Desai have shown

how this steady patronage transformed the landscape of Mughal Banaras.
However, Persian sources are conspicuous by their absence in present scholarship about Banaras. We know nearly nothing about who was writing in Persian in Mughal Banaras, what kinds of Persian narratives and genres Banaras was appearing in across the subcontinent, and who was patronizing and reading these texts. This panel addresses this gap by bringing forward understudied narratives about Banaras which emerge from early modern Persian sources across generic and religious lines. The first paper in this panel compares two Persian masnawīs composed by Musawi Khan Fitrat (d. 1690-91) and Binish Kashmiri (d. 1689-90), in the second half of the seventeenth century which present uniquely layered narratives about Banaras, seeming to draw on both the imaginaire of the sacred Hindu city in Sanskrit sources as well as contemporary rumors and scandals about some influential inhabitants of the city. The second paper focuses on a late 18th-century Indo-Persian mathnawi, the Kashi-stut ("Hymn to Varanasi") by Matan Lal Afarin, a Kayastha scribe from Allahabad. This paper examines the geopoetic and biopoetic discourses found in the poem and locates them in the wider textual landscape of late Mughal North India. The third paper explores the Bahr al-Najat, a late eighteenth-century Persian translation of the popular Sanskrit Kashi Khanda ("Book of Kashi"), produced for the British Resident of Banaras by Anandghan 'Khwush', a Brahman educated in Persian. This paper examines how the mythical past of this sacred city, its traditions of pilgrimage, and Banaras-focused soteriology were reimagined in Persian for colonial audience. The fourth paper examines the Sanskrit and Persian works of Mathuranath Shukla (fl.1782-1825) to show how advanced Persian literacy allowed pandits of Banaras to become cultural brokers, using Persian as the bridge between the Sanskrit textual traditions and colonial knowledge.

"The Perfect Place for Flirting and Lovemaking": Unexpected Narratives about Banaras in Seventeenth Century Persian Mathnawīs

by Ojaswini Shekhawat / Yale University / ojaswini.shekhawat@yale.edu

Celebrating the beauty of imperial cities emerged as a prominent theme in early modern Persian poetry. From Isfahan and Shiraz to Kashmir, Agra, and Lahore, delicate descriptions of cities abound - the taverns, coffeehouses, gardens, architecture and patrons, and the numerous ways in which these cities were paradise on earth. Sunil Sharma points out that provincial cities were rarely part of this map. However, in the seventeenth century, the small but significant city of Banaras (also Kashi or Varanasi) begins to emerge as a theme in Persian narratives of place; very different in flavour when compared to Sanskrit genres of purāṇas and mahātmyas, and their later Persian translations, extolling Kashi.
This paper explores two understudied mathnawīs - the Mathnawī dar Mājrā-yi Banāras [The Mathnawī about the Story of Banaras] of Mūsawī Khān Fiṭrat (d.1690-91) and the Shūr-i Khayāl [The Fervor of Fancy] of Bīnish Kashmīrī (d.1689-90) to conceptualize a strand of Persian narratives about Banaras in seventeenth century literature. Both mathnawīs employ the sanctified landscape of Banaras as the backdrop for stories of Hindu and Muslim lovers who fall in love, and drown to death in this city.
This paper argues that while the Sanskrit compositions of sixteenth and seventeenth century Brahmans emphasized the eternal glory and sacrality of Kashi, these Persian texts blended this sacred imaginaire with contemporaneous scandals and rumors which were popularly associated with Banaras at the time. In doing so, this paper enquires how Banaras came to have the reputation of the perfect place for flirtation and love-making in the seventeenth century, antithetical to the more mainstream perception of Banaras as the sacred Hindu city. However, even as they compose the same story, Mūsawī Khān Fiṭrat and Bīnish Kashmīrī avulse very different meanings from the banks, pyres, rituals, crowds and lovers of Banaras. Both mathnawīs nudge the reader to look for "tāzagī" (freshness) not only at the level of complex form, but also in the intricate layering of new themes.

“If There is a Paradise on Earth”: Praising Banaras in Eighteenth-Century Persian Translations from Sanskrit

by Ayelet Kotler / Leiden University / ayeletkot@gmail.com

The city of Banaras (or Kashi) has been considered for centuries among the most sacred sites for Hindus. The numerous Sanskrit hymns and mythical stories about gods and sages that are dedicated to the glorification of Banaras are key in tracing the processes through which the city was sanctified. With the spread of Persian learning among Hindus in North India during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, texts dedicated to the praise of Kashi began to be composed in Persian. Most of them, and especially Persian translations of ancient Hindu lore that narrate stories about Banaras, have remained entirely unedited and unexamined to this day.

This paper explores the 1794 Bahr al-Najat (“Sea of Liberation”), the Persian translation of the popular Sanskrit Kashi Khanda (“Book of Kashi”). Penned by the Persian-educated brahman Anandghan ‘Khwush’, who resided and worked in Banaras in the 1790s, this text comprises of around 1,000 folios divided between five volumes. Khwush, whose day job was teaching Sanskrit at the newly founded Banaras Sanskrit College, was commissioned by the British Resident of Banaras to translate several Sanskrit texts into Persian in addition to his Bahr al-Najat. In my talk I briefly discuss Khwush’s larger literary oeuvre before zooming in on his treatment of the glorious ancient past of Banaras. I look at a selection of chapters that elaborate on the salvific qualities of the city and its mythical past to examine how Banaras is described and celebrated as well as how Banaras-focused theology is made sense of in Persian for Khwush’s British readers. This study thus focuses on the intersection of Persian literary culture, Hindu traditions of worship and pilgrimage, and early colonial rule.

Persian literacy and cultural brokerage in the city of pandits

by Jean Arzoumanov / MPIWG Berlin / jean.arzoumanov@gmail.com

Prior to the late eighteenth century, advanced literacy in both Sanskrit and Persian – the two languages of science, besides Arabic – is rarely documented, despite a growing number of Hindu literati becoming highly proficient in Persian. In Banaras, Mathurānāth Śukla, a Brahman from Malwa, first appears in records in 1782 as the author of respected Sanskrit works on astronomy (siddhānta). With the development of the British colonial administration, Mathurānāth Śukla later secured a role as a cultural broker, using Persian as an intermediary between Sanskrit scholastic culture and colonial knowledge. In 1812, he penned the Riyaz al-mazāhib (Gardens of religions) for a colonial officer, a work describing North Indian religious communities. Shortly thereafter, he became the librarian for the newly established Sanskrit College, a position he held from 1813 until his death in 1818 at the age of 60. As a librarian he composed two introductions to Sanskrit written in Persian, reminiscent of similar instructional texts that used Persian as a bridge language for British officers attempting to learn Sanskrit and engage Sanskrit sources. This paper surveys the works of Mathurānāth Śukla in both Sanskrit and Persian, and situates his trajectory as a Persophone pandit within the longue durée history of Sanskrit-Persian dual literacy in North India.

A theatre on the Ganges: water and the ascetic body in and around Matan Lal Afarin’s Kashi-stut.

by Stefano Pello / pello@unive.it

This paper will focus on a late 18th-century Indo-Persian mathnawi, the Kashi-stut (Hymn to Varanasi) by a little known Kayastha scribe from Allahabad, Matan Lal Afarin, closely looking at some specific geopoetic and biopoetic discourses found in the poem and locating them in the wider textual landscape of late Mughal North India. Completed in 1778-9 and consisting of ca. 2200 couplets in the hazaj metre, the Kashi-stut has been completely ignored by modern scholarship until very recently,

when the present writer devoted a preliminary essay to the mathnawi, reading it as a striking case-study to explore the early modern re-invention of the classical Persian poetics of "idolatry". In this presentation, I will shift my attention on the textualization of two interconnected realities of the Varanasi cityscape: the flowing waters of the Ganges and the multiple subjectivities of the ascetics living on its banks. As a matter of fact, both the body of the river and the bodies of the renunciates are the declared theme of two specific sections of the text: I will explore here how the panegyristic portrait – a true geopoetic madih – of the Ganges as well as the shahrashub of the ascetics play a fundamental role in representing, as in a narrative theatre, the phenomenic and perceptual dynamics of tabi'at/prakrti (physis or natura in the Graeco-Latin philosophical tradition). In this perspective, I will ultimately show how Afarin's conceptual configuration of the environment of Varanasi in Persian verse is to be read, to be properly understood, against the background of a thick intertextual net, from Indo-Persian tazkira literature to the 17th c.- masters of Safavid-Mughal Persian poetry to contemporary philosophical writings.

Room 1.11

113. New Approaches to the Persian Majmū'a(s) and Jung(s) [book compilations]

Chair: Mahroo Moosavi

The archives of Persian manuscripts held in libraries across the world include an extensive number of compilations, often catalogued under the comprehensive, yet not exhaustive, titles of majmū'a and jung. These collections, mainly dating to the 13th to 18th centuries, cover a wide range of genres and themes and materialise them in manners which have rarely been studied. These themes and genres include chancellery inshā, personal epistles, royal decrees, seals, occult texts, paintings, diagrams, poetry, non-chancellery prose, tales, riddles, art treatises, medical texts, cooking recipes, dream interpretations and much more. This panel focuses on collections known by several taxonomic terminologies, including safīne, bayāż, kashkūl, jarīde, ganjīne, gulchīn, and muraqqa' and studies them from the historical, art-historical, and philological points of view.

The panel is concerned with identifying and discussing potential methodologies through which this corpus may be approached and analysed. The three papers in this panel will deal with this aspect through three topics: 1) Majmū'a(s) as pedagogical archives; 2) Majmū'a(s) as collected juxtapositions of textual and visual narratives; 3) Majmū'a(s) as devised topographies of sub-texts. In this context, the papers will collectively ask: How and why were these material collected, curated, and assembled? Since many of these compilations were created through processes of reuse of previous material, under what mechanisms and logics did this de and re materialisation of the source material function? What was the potential agency of the jāmi' [compiler] in substantiating a majmū'a? And, to what extent did the actual and virtual properties of the compilations connote forms of intellectual-artistic subjectivity? In other words what do these mechanisms of book assembly and production reveal about the psychology, religio-polity, and culture within the Iranian and broader Persianate societies? And through what collective memory and creative networks do these diverse, seemingly unrelated, at times fragmentary book materials intersect?

Early Modern Persian Majmū'a(s) as Devised Topographies of Sub-texts: The Case of MS. or. fol. 209 in the State Library of Berlin

by Mahroo Moosavi / Max-Planck Institute, Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz / mahroo.moosavi@gmail.com

A note at the beginning of MS. or. fol. 209, a monumental book compilation manuscript consisting of poetry and occasional paintings, completed in 1666 in Qazvin and currently housed in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin mentions: "The author of this majmū'a is not amongst those who randomly put together several texts in a compilation. Rather, this book is a carefully planned compilation for which, even selecting the title of the book was a difficult choice". This paper centres

on one hand, on this note by the commissioner of the compilation, Dāvūd Bayk Yūz-Bāshī a military head at the time of the Safavid Shah Sulaymān (1666-1694), and on the other hand, on the content and layout of the fihrist (included in the first two folios) of the MS which in an unprecedented manner, meticulously represents the nuanced content and complex layout of the book.
By a close analysis of the intellectual properties and graphical strategies of the compilation, the paper offers a new understanding of the concept of fihrist in the book cultures of early modern Iran, as a uniquely devised and tailored method of controlling the seemingly fragmented sub-texts of a compilation. This study sheds light on the understudied self-awareness of the commissioner/patron and compiler in the heavy strategic planning of the compilations and their potential vision for the micro-manners of operation of the book across its several life bubbles within the communities of literati. This authorial deliberateness and the manners by which the examination of the majmūʻa manuscripts enables us to draw a potential map of the author's - and reader's - psyche and consequently the Safavid book cultures is the point of focus across the paper.

Documentation or Evocation?, Compiled Landscapes and other Nature Images
by Margaret Shortle / Museum for Islamic Art, Pergamon / mshortle@gmail.com
In an effort to identify new methodologies for examining Persianate compilations of Persian literary and visual materials, I suspect we must first differentiate the output from the input and further negotiate the complex process of that exchange. Past scholarship on the visual elements of compilations has fixated on typologies of paintings and illuminated designs as means to confirm provenance or a geographical and chronological context within which to situate a manuscript and its possible story. Attending to seals, royal decrees and other material elements has added layers of complexity and demonstrated that the manuscripts and their contents are exceptionally dynamic and mobile. Because mobility increases the possibilities for collecting source materials, I propose to question whether the final curated collated and compiled material bear witness to or encourage motion. The questions necessitate a review of representation and realism in Persian painting, and I seek to examine a selection of landscapes and other fragmented images of nature in small corpus of anthologies dating to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. I focus especially on the landscape paintings and underlying spatial logic in Yazma 1450 (Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi, Istanbul) and seek to approximate which actual landscapes they may represent. Can these contextually map the movements or desired spaces of their possible Jalayrid or Qaraquyunlu audiences? How too do the paintings relate to the surrounding textual materials? If I extract an even broader lens and consider additional juxtapositions, of landscape imagery and collated textual materials circulating within the same chronological moment, do patterns emerge that function like the building blocks for new developments Persianate intellectual output, propelled by the mobile forces of preceding Mongol upheaval? Whereas I contend that these questions resist an easy answer, I suspect that by focusing in on the landscapes, their underlying spatial logic and other images of nature, one might argue that the visual elements collected and collated in a small selection Persian literary anthologies simultaneously document and evoke lived and mobile experiences.

Majmūʿas as Pedagogical Archives: The Kāteb Stemma and the Didactic Function of Safavid Compilations
by Gennady Kurin / U of Oxford / gennady.kurin@gmail.com
This paper explores the pedagogical and memorial functions of late Safavid majmūʿas through the case of the Kāteb stemma—a group of eight manuscripts that preserve a distinct variant of Shah Ṭahmāsb's Five Stories within two major epistolographic collections: Monshaʾāt-e Ṣādeqā-ye Tabrīzī and Jong-e Aḥmad Gholām. Produced between 1600 and 1730, these compilations emerge not as

random accumulations of bureaucratic prose but as didactic manuals designed for the moral and political education of princes and scribes.
The inclusion of Ṭahmāsb's composition—his discursive, quasi-autobiographical reflections on power, virtue, and diplomacy—within these collections reveals how majmūʿas operated as repositories of royal memory and instruments of ethical formation. The earliest copies, dated 1009–1010 AH (1600–1601), coincide with the formative years of Crown Prince Muḥammad Bāqir Mīrzā, suggesting that Ṣādeqā-ye Tabrīzī's compilation was conceived as a mirror for princes in manuscript form. The Kāteb stemma's two prefaces, colophons, and textual layering further attest to a culture of scribal pedagogy in which compilation itself was a didactic act—a process of curating exemplary letters, edicts, and narratives to instruct both the mind and the hand.
By reading these majmūʿas as pedagogical archives rather than passive repositories, the paper proposes a new framework for understanding how textual assemblage functioned as a medium of political education and cultural continuity in early modern Iran. It thus reconceptualizes the majmūʿa as a technology of Safavid governance—an epistemic form through which princely virtue, dynastic memory, and scribal skill were simultaneously transmitted and performed.

Room 1.15

114. The Familiar Stranger. Encounters with the Iranian and non-Iranian 'Other' in Persian Literature

Chair: Renata Rusek-Kowalska

The figure of the stranger — qarib — recurs throughout Persian literature, embodying social, religious, national, and mystical dimensions. Focusing on contemporary texts, the panel examines representations of the Other as both an alienated individual and a collective identity defined by ethnic, cultural, or ideological difference. The discussion explores how fiction and autobiographical narratives reflect Iran's social diversity and tensions, and how linguistic strategies articulate estrangement and self-definition. The concept of "meeting the Other" is examined not only through literary themes but also through linguistic strategies, revealing how language itself becomes a tool for expressing estrangement and negotiating self-identity. The selected texts offer valuable insights into the dynamics of self and Other on different levels of literary worlds.
Hence, the panel juxtaposes portrayals of familiar, internal Others with depictions of exotic ones — notably Eastern European refugees who arrived in Iran during World War II. Their literary presence, recorded in Persian memoirs and fiction, enriches the understanding of alterity and contributes to a broader reimagining of Iranian self-identity.

Shahrnush Parsipur and Her Prison Archipelagos

by Renata Rusek-Kowalska / Jagiellonian University / renata.rusek@uj.edu.pl

Shahrnush Parsipur, in her Prison Memoirs (Khaterat-e zendan, 1996), recounts her four imprisonments in Iran — the first under the Pahlavi regime and the subsequent three under the Islamic Republic. Her autobiographical narrative can be read through the lens of Campbell's monomyth: like an epic hero, she traverses the carceral underworld, undergoing a series of trials reminiscent of the haft khan. During these ordeals, she encounters various "others" — both prison officials and fellow inmates.
At the same time, as a sociologist who declares herself apolitical, Parsipur visits the cells occupied by different political groups, conducting a kind of participant observation. Her detached yet insightful portrayals of prison guards, monarchists, Mojahedin, and leftist prisoners evoke ethnographic field notes from an expedition to the archipelago of the Trobriands. In these accounts, the writer offers a penetrating depiction of the prison as a political microcosm of Iran, frequently enriching her descriptions with a distinctly literary quality — irony.

In my paper, I will explore how the epic, ethnographic, and ironic modes intersect in her prison narrative, read as an account of a journey through the exotic territories of her estranged homeland.

Familiarized strangers – Polish 2nd World War women in the Iranian society

by Anna Krasnowolska / Jagiellonian University, Prof. emerita / anna.krasnowolska@gmail.com

Since the beginning of the 21th century on, the 2nd World War Polish exodus from Soviet labor camps through Iran is arousing some interest of Iranian historians, journalists and writers. After some 80 years after those events, the traces of Polish presence in Iran are collected and documented. The Polish women who married in Iran, became integrated into its society and most commonly have been classified in the madam category of Armenian and East European women, that is, a sort of half-European. To my knowledge only two large interviews with the last Poles surviving in Iran have been published in Persian. Their memories serve the authors of literary fiction as the base for their plots. Since the source material is scanty, there is much place left for reconstruction and speculation. In my paper I explore the double perspective of the Poles taking root in Iranian society and the Iranians trying to "domesticate" and categorize them. My basic material are the interviews: with Helena Stelmach by her husband Mohammad Ali Nikpur (2009) and with Maria Bajdan by Narges Kharakāni (2023), as well as literary works: M. Ensāfi, To be Esfahān baz khāhi gasht (2013), M. Shirmohammadi, Khāne-ye Lahestānihā (2015) and Shāhzāde N. Igu'āl, Nām-e u Marjān (2024).

Meeting the 'Other': Linguistic and Narrative Strategies in Farhād Ja'fari's "Café Piano"

by Katarzyna Wąsala / Assisstant Professor in the Department of Iranian Studies at Jagiellonian University (Kraków, Poland) / katarzyna.wasala@uj.edu.pl

Café Piano [کافه پیانو] is a popular Persian novel written by journalist and political activist Farhād Ja'fari. First published in 2007 by the Tehran-based publisher Našr-e Češme, it has seen over sixty reprints to date (copies available in Iranian online bookstores reach the 64th edition, printed in 2022). The novel tells the story of a journalist and writer who runs a café in order to earn a sum of money equal to his wife's dowry, enabling him to divorce her. The narrative unfolds on a slow pace, through a first-person perspective in a light, conversational style.

In my presentation, I aim to demonstrate how the notion of "meeting the Other" functions as the central organizing concept of this novel, around which both its form and content are structured. It is evident on a general level – in the interaction between narrator and reader, facilitated by frequent use of direct address and informal tone – as well as in the protagonist's in-text interactions with café guests, family members and friends.

My particular interest lies in the linguistic realization of this concept and the ways in which it informs the novel's stylistic and structural choices. The language of Café Piano has already been analyzed in the monograph "Modern Spoken Persian in Contemporary Iranian Novels" (2023), where the influence of spoken standard of modern Persian on its language was traced on the grammatical level. In this presentation, I turn to its functional and pragmatic dimension. In my talk, I will compare selected meetings depicted in the novel from a linguistic perspective, illustrating how language contributes to creating situations in which the "Other" may be either familiarized or estranged.

Room 1.16

115. Persian and German Literary Encounters

Chair: Annie Pfeifer

A profound interest in Persian culture and literature emerged in the literary sphere of nineteenth-century Germany. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's "West-östlicher Divan" is perhaps the most famous expression of this tendency, but by no means the only one. Writers and thinkers such as Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, August von Platen, Friedrich Rückert, and later Friedrich Nietzsche translated, adapted, and composed poetry inspired by their encounters with Hafez, Rumi, Zoroaster, and other

figures of the Persian canon. This panel proposes to revisit this moment not merely as an instance of Orientalist fascination, but as a dynamic and productive encounter between literary traditions. By reading Persian and German texts alongside one another, the panel aims to examine how translation and poetic form became a medium of cultural and emotional exchange. What happens to Persian poetry when it is carried into German, and how does this process reshape the German literary field? At the same time, how might this dialogue allow us to return to the Persian sources and read them anew, attentive to the transformative resonances they acquired in nineteenth and twentieth-century Europe?

Writing Kabul in Berlin After 2021

by Michael Swellander / Skidmore College / mswellander@skidmore.edu

The 2024 bilingual German-Persian poetry anthology Schicksalsanschläge (حواله سرزنوشت) collects poetry by 16 Afghan and Iranian writers currently living in Berlin. Berlin is a fortuitous, if accidental, geographical locus for the anthology considering its history as a center of Persian-language exile literature activity throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and for the broader role Berlin has often assumed in literature and philosophy as a living metaphor of twentieth-century history. Another city looms large in the anthology, however, namely Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, which the Taliban has occupied since 2021. In the anthology, Kabul takes on many kinds of historical, temporal, and personal significance. For the Iranian contributors Ali Abdollahi and Mohammadreza Haj Rostambegloo, the fall of Kabul inspires expressions of political solidarity with Afghan women who are subjected to the Taliban's gender apartheid regime, as well as a sense of transhistorical Persianate solidarity through invocations of historical Khorasan, which encompassed parts of present-day Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan. Kabul plays a different role in the poems of Afghan contributors. In poems by Asef Hosseini, Nasir Nadeem, Mustapha Samady, Mariam Meetra, and others – Kabul is overlaid on Berlin. The Afghan poets living and working in Berlin experience the German capital as a vague outline of a city, upon which the memories of Kabul, the voices of family still there, and a blank future are projected. My talk will explore these figurations of Kabul, the significance of Berlin as a backdrop to the poems, and how the discussion of these two cities reflects on experiences of exile, migration, and translation in the anthology. My talk will also consider this anthology in the context of other recent artworks responding to the 2021 fall of Kabul from Europe and the United States.

Speaking for Zarathustra: Nietzsche's Encounter with Zoroastrianism

by Annie Pfeifer / Columbia University / ap750@columbia.edu

In his 1967 essay, "Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?" the German philosopher Martin Heidegger explores the ways in which "the speaker Zarathustra is an 'advocate'—a Fürsprecher." Yet, Heidegger and most of the scholars who tried to answer this question never bothered to examine who Zarathustra was in the first place. A deeper examination of this question reveals not only why the founder of Zoroastrianism was not an accidental choice, but the ways in which the problems of representation, advocacy, and "Fürsprache" are central to the construction of Friedrich Nietzsche's famous novel "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" (1883). To what extent does Nietzsche speak for Zarathustra or is it Zarathustra who speaks for Nietzsche?

Like many Orientalists who denied the modernity of their subject of study, Nietzsche focused mainly on ancient, pre-Islamic period Persian history. This paper offers another answer to the question of "Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?" by examining the text on two levels: 1) as a radical philosophical search for origins that breaks with classical antiquity and 2) against the backdrop of the growing scholarship on Indo-Iranian philology and the Avesta.

Form as Desire: Rückert's Ghazals between Hafez and Rumi

by Yarden Yosef Ben Zur / Haifa University / y.benzur@gmail.com

This paper examines Friedrich Rückert's Ghazals after Rumi (1819) as a site of intercultural form-making where Persian and German poetics meet in translation. Rückert's cycle reveals, upon close philological scrutiny, a complex double origin. Drawing on both Rumi's Divan-e Shams and Hafez's Divan (in Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall's German translations), Rückert fuses elements from each into a hybrid poetic structure that neither reproduces nor replaces its Persian models. His ghazals, I argue, enact a movement between the mystical inwardness of Rumi and the ironic sensuality of Hafez, transforming translation itself into a mode of poetic longing.

Through close readings of Rückert's texts alongside the Persian originals, the paper traces how formal features such as the refrain (radīf), rhyme scheme (qāfiyah), and the convention of self-naming (takhallus) become vehicles of affective translation. Rückert's engagement with the ghazal form performs what Antoine Berman calls "the trial of the foreign": a deliberate exposure to the linguistic and spiritual otherness of Persian poetics.

In dialogue with the panel's focus on translation and poetic form as media of cultural and emotional exchange, the paper reconsiders Rückert's ghazals not as acts of imitation but as experiments in poetic embodiment. Reading Persian and German texts side by side, it shows how Rückert's work stages desire as a formal principle, a Sehnsucht inscribed in rhythm and repetition, that redefines the terms of cultural translation in nineteenth-century Europe.

The Hafez in Platen's Mirror

by Amir Irani-Tehrani / United States Military Academy, West Point / amir.irani-tehrani@westpoint.edu

The early publications of German poet, August von Platen (1796-1835) starting in 1821 were German poems in the ghazal form primarily inspired by those of Hafez, whom he studied Persian to read in the original. Following the publication of his third Hafez-inspired cycle, Spiegel des Hafis (1822, "Mirror to Hafez") the young poet received a job offer as a research assistant to Joseph von Hammer, the doyen of Austrian orientalism and the first comprehensive translator of Hafez, whose work had inspired the Goethean Divan. But Platen did not want to be a research scholar. Instead, while continuing to write poems in the ghazal form until shortly before his early death in Sicily, he stopped using any further Hafez-inspired imagery in any of his future works. This paper aims to locate in Persian and German source material, the Hafez in Platen's works, especially in the Mirror.

Room 1.17

116. Philology II: "World Philology" and the Adab Disciplines

Chair: Samuel Hodgkin

Recent conversations about "world philology (or philologies)" have placed the adab system of disciplines in an analogic relation to disciplines concerned with language and belles lettres in other literate societies, both synchronous (placing adab within a shared periodization of early modern philological revolutions across the Old World) and asynchronous (considering the ways that oriental and national philology adapted disciplinary and professional structures from adab). But these politically freighted arguments require more grounding in the specifics of method. Which of the adab practices of lexicography, grammar, poetics, rhetoric, textology, and textual interpretation fit readily into the analogies and genealogies of "world philology," and which can only be understood in relation to the specific disciplinary arrangement of adab? This panel considers the nuts and bolts of adab as/and philology through case studies, including the role of Islam in grammars and rhetoric manuals from the early modern Persianate peripheries, the circulation and interpretation of the Persianate mystical corpus among early modern Kurdish scholars and poets, the orientalist Sir

William Jones' reception of Inju's Farhang-i Jahangiri, and the memory of the adab disciplines among the Persophone national philologists.

Learning, Translation, and Mystical Imagination: Kurdish Engagements within the Persianate Intellectual Geography

by Serdar Şengül / Kırşehir Ahi Evran University / serdarsenguls@gmail.com

This paper explores the circulation and reinterpretation of mystical literature within the broader Persianate intellectual geography, focusing on how Kurdish scholars and poets of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries participated in this shared world of learning. Drawing on Peter Burke's concept of cultural translation, it approaches these encounters not as derivative borrowings but as reciprocal acts of intellectual exchange that sustained a transregional dialogue of spirituality, language, and knowledge.

In Kurdish madrasas, Persian served as both a literary and scholarly medium. Works by Saʿdī, ʿAttār, Ḥāfeẓ, and Jāmī were often read in their original Persian, not as part of the formal curriculum but through informal study circles led by teachers and students with a special interest in mystical literature. Persian was thus acquired through the practice of close reading, textual commentary, and reflection on ethical and metaphysical ideas. This pedagogical tradition has continued in some Kurdish contexts today, where scholars prepare bilingual Kurdish–Persian editions of classical works, using them as tools for both linguistic instruction and spiritual cultivation.

Through close readings of selected Kurdish texts—especially those composed in Kurmanci—the paper demonstrates how poets such as Melayê Cizîrî, Feqiyê Teyran, and Ehmedê Xanî reinterpreted the Sufi lexicon of love, union, and divine knowledge within their own linguistic and philosophical horizons.

By situating these practices within the wider Persianate world, the paper argues that Kurdish engagements with mystical literature represent a distinctive form of cultural translation and intellectual participation—one that reveals how learning, translation, and imagination together sustained a multilingual and spiritually connected literary ecology across the early modern Persianate sphere.

Remembering Adab as Discipline and Profession

by Samuel Hodgkin / Yale University / s.g.hodgkin@gmail.com

From Goethe and Tagore to John Guillory, it is a commonplace for writers reflecting on the longue durée of literary scholarship and criticism to observe that modern institutions disaggregated the aesthetic, ethical, and professional-bureaucratic functions of rhetoric into a range of narrower disciplines and professions. It is therefore worth clarifying what is distinctive about the transition from the "polymaths" of adab to the poets, literary historians, theologians, and other specialists who flourished in the modern nations of Persianate Eurasia. This task is especially vital because the scholarly reconstruction of adab, grounded in the decolonial assumption that modernity entailed an epistemic rupture, has become heir to the Romantic idea that modern specialization fractured a prior intellectual-cultural unity that gave premodern scholars better access to the totality. This talk places recent accounts of the transition from adab to adabiyat in conversation with several 20th-century reflections on this transition. Some are elegiac, like the Tajik public intellectual Muhammadjon Shakuri's memoirs, and others more ambivalent, like Ahmad Kasravi's reflections on the relationship between adibs and orientalists, but these accounts all attend to the relationship between changing methodologies and changing professions in ways that should inform our scholarship on the late- and post-Persianate.

Grammar and Rhetoric in Persianate Islam

by Alexander Jabbari / University of Minnesota / ajab@umn.edu
Much recent scholarship has been concerned with how to make sense of Islam's multiple valences. Whether these are conceived of as "discourses" (Shahab Ahmed, 2016) or "registers" (Matthew L. Keegan, 2023, following Marion Holmes Katz, 2022), they generally break down into two camps, focused primarily either on law or adab. This bifurcation of Islam goes back at least as far as Marshall Hodgson's division in The Venture of Islam (1974) between the "sharīʿah-minded" scholars and the Sufis. In many such accounts, the adab- or Sufi-centric approach is especially prominent in the Persianate world. This talk attempts to think about what is shared across that divide within the context of the Persianate sphere. I argue that philology—in particular, grammar and rhetoric—serves as a connective tissue linking these multiple valences of Persianate Islam. These philological practices are applied in nearly equal measure to the Qur'an and hadith, on the one hand, and to adab on the other. In this talk I focus on analyzing early modern primary sources concerned with Persian philology from opposite geographical extremes of the Persianate world, namely the Ottoman empire and China. I read these sources, whether Persian grammatical manuals or explorations of Persian rhetoric, as exemplifying connections between grammar, rhetoric, and Islam.

A Mughal Farhang (1608) and a British Colonial Grammar (1771): A Comparative Analysis
by Rajeev Kinra / Northwestern University / r-kinra@northwestern.edu
It has been well known for several decades now that Indo-Persian cultures of comparative philology — particularly as practiced in early modern Mughal India — played a part in the formation of what has come to be considered the "new" philology of the modern era, said to be inaugurated by the career of Sir William Jones (d. 1794), and that this role was subsequently erased in triumphalist Eurocentric narratives of modernity through a process described by Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi as "Orientalism's genesis amnesia." Subsequent scholarship has only enhanced our knowledge of pre- and early modern Indo-Persian philological cultures, but one thing that has yet to be examined or explained in detail is the precise nature of such works' influence on that of European scholars like Jones. We know quite definitively, for instance, that Jones was introduced to Jamal al-Din Husain Inju's Farhang-i Jahangiri (1608) very early in his career as an Orientalist, indeed several years before he published his own famous Grammar of the Persian Language (1771), and that Jones continued to study and rely on Inju's Farhang as a reference throughout his career. But what, exactly, was the relationship between the actual contents of the Farhang (particularly its introductory treatise on the history, grammar, and varieties of Persian) and the Grammar that Jones himself eventually produced? On the surface, the two texts are in fact quite different. But, as I hope to show in this paper, upon closer examination one can nevertheless discern some of the subtle ways in which Inju's insights into the nuances of the Persian language — particularly literary Persian — helped to shape Jones's own understanding, not just of Persian itself but of language(s) more generally.

Room 1.18

117. Thinking Farsi-zaban Geographies through Afghanistan: Knowledge Production, Archives, and Politics in Transnational Perspective

Chair: Ahmad Rashid Salim, Paniz Musawi Natanzi

This panel takes the term Farsi-zaban (Persian-speaking) as an entry point to examine archival practices, knowledge production and politics from the eighteenth century to the present. By decoupling Farsi-zaban from the meanings crafted and circulated by colonial and imperial anthropologists and linguists and national elites in Afghanistan, the panel aims to explore the historical and political geographies that the concept Farsi-zaban can reveal. It engages two interrelated sets of questions drawing on archival and theoretical as well as ethnographic, and qualitative research methods. The panel investigates how power operates through political and academic formations that shape how we come to know "the Persianate." Furthermore, it considers

how seminal, recent and burgeoning interdisciplinary scholarship on race, ethnicity, and gender unsettles Iranian studies by tracing Persian-speaking worlds in transnational and transhistorical contexts that decenter "the Persian." The papers offer interdisciplinary approaches to engaging with these questions: the first paper conducts a comparative translation reading of two eighteenth-century French and English histories of the siege of Isfahan to reveal the West's historical deployment of sexual and gendered rhetorics in their imaginations of Afghan and Persian identities. The second paper traces how women's translational and editorial labor shaped a Farsi-zaban intellectual world spanning Kabul and North India, drawing on multiple print sources from the 1920s to illuminate new geographies of knowledge that decenter Iran and unsettle inherited ways of knowing "the Persianate." The third paper examines through the work of rapper Soaban how rap-e Dari zirzamini (Dari underground rap) opens a space for reflecting on intellectual labor, politics and masculinity in Persian-speaking Afghanistan. In doing so, the panel invites participants to grapple through Farsi-zaban as a concept with the political and intellectual possibilities the term can hold.

Feeling Blackness in Persian-speaking Afghanistan: Masculinity, Politics and the Intellectual in the Dari Underground Rap of Soaban

by Paniz Musawi Natanzi / University of Bern / pmusawi@upenn.edu

This paper takes the rap-e Dari zirzamini (Dari underground rap) of Soaban, a rapper, producer, and physician born in Iran and raised in Afghanistan from an early age, as an entry point to examine the question of the intellectual in Farsi-zaban (Persian-speaking) Afghanistan. Soaban offers an account of rap as zirzamini, a form of expressing farhang-e bumi, i.e., a culture that takes shape within a specific locale and centers on ordinariness in Afghanistan. The paper draws on semi-structured interviews and conversations with Soaban, his music archive, and Black feminist theorists to explore what the concept of zirzamini (underground) politically and theoretically offers. It decenters "the Persian" and introduces the concept of "feeling black" to grapple with the emotional and political ties forged with Black life and culture in the United States. In doing so, the paper argues that thinking with masculine rappers not only remakes and shores up understandings of mard budan (being a man) but also considers intellectual labor through Kabuli Persian accounts of how processes of racialization and ethnicization, right-wing politics and feminist discourses affect bodies as well as social and political life in Afghanistan. By examining what it means to think alongside masculine Muslim intellectuals such as the rapper Soaban, the paper invites to discuss how people-centered archives of present-day Afghanistan can hone our understanding of politics in Persian-speaking worlds transnationally.

Women, Translation and Farsi-zabān Geographies of Reform

by Marya Hannun / University of Exeter / m.hannun@exeter.ac.uk

This paper examines the translational labor of ʿUlyā Janāb (d. 1910)—an Urdu-speaking Afghan member of the royal family, who rendered Al-Fārūq, Shiblī Nuʿmānī's magnum opus on the caliph ʿUmar, into Persian in the early twentieth century—to rethink the geographies of Persianate knowledge production. Mentioned only in passing in the historical record, ʿUlyā Janāb's translation reveals a Farsi-zabān world of intellectual exchange that connected Kabul's royal harem to the reformist Urdu literary sphere of British India. Her work unsettles Iran-centered narratives of Persianate modernity by foregrounding Afghanistan as a crucial, though often ignored, site of linguistic and conceptual production. In doing so, it speaks to recent scholarship that seeks to move beyond civilizational or nation-centered frames of the Persianate, approaching it instead through geographies of knowledge, mediation, and translation. Taking Farsi-zabān as a critical analytic rather than a purely linguistic category, the paper approaches translation as a mode of authorship and mediation through which Afghan intellectuals—women as well as men—participated in inter-Asian

debates about reform, faith, and modernity. Read alongside other contemporaneous sources such as the works of Muhammadi Begum, the pioneering Urdu-language editor and author of Tahzīb-i Niswān, ʿUlyā Janāb's work reveals how women's translation and writing animated a shared reformist discourse across Urdu and Persian publics. By tracing these crossings, the paper argues for a re-mapping of Persianate intellectual history through the Farsi-zabān worlds sustained by women's labor. It concludes by reflecting on the feminist afterlives of such work—how acts of translation that were once marginal or anonymous continue to generate new ways of knowing, reading, and situating the Persianate beyond the territorial and epistemic boundaries of Iran.

Translating Afghanistan: Jonas Hanway Sexualizes the Siege of Isfahan
by Mursal Sidiqi / University of Pennsylvania / mursalsidiqi7@gmail.com
In the year 1722, the Hotak Afghans besieged Isfahan, leading to the downfall of the Safavid Persian empire. This moment marks the beginning of Britain's interest in and concern about Afghanistan's growing imperial power. This talk takes up one of the earliest British histories of the Afghan empires, Jonas Hanway's The Revolutions of Persia (1753). As Hanway historicizes "Afghanistan" before the term entered the English lexicon, it has gone largely unexamined in contemporary studies of Anglo-Afghan relations. Several scholars have identified that Hanway's history is an amalgamation of the works of other European authors such as Judasz Tadeusz Krusinski, Louis André de la Mamie de Clairac, and James Bailie Fraser. Yet, the special case of Clairac has not been sufficiently studied. Clairac's two-volume Histoire de Perse (1750) is not translated into English; thus, when Hanway draws from Clairac's text, he must translate from the French himself. Through a comparative translation reading, this talk tracks Hanway's linguistic adaptations of passages from Clairac's text to reveal the beginnings of a distinct sexual and gendered rhetoric deployed to characterize the Afghan polity. These representations distinguish the Afghan polity from other "Oriental" empires, particularly Persia and India, to simultaneously account for Afghanistan's exceptional, empire-ending military prowess and to rhetorically contain its growing imperial power. This talk takes up the case of Afghanistan to extend studies of rhetorical infrastructures deployed against semicolonial nations in eighteenth-century British imperial culture–a rhetoric which we, as contemporary scholars of empire, have unwittingly inherited.

Room 2.17

118. Iranian Encounters: Americans with and in Iran, Iranians with America and in the Region

Chair: Norma Claire Moruzzi

This panel brings together four new books presenting fresh research on Iranian-US relationships, considered at the individual, the national, and the regional levels, and from the early 20th into the 21st centuries. All of the studies incorporate transnational and national focus, examining how individuals and states manage cross-border and cross-cultural encounters as strangers, acquaintances, rivals, or friends. In each case, the research interrogates the conflicting relationships between pre-existing structures of expectation and the unexpected dynamics of local encounters. These closely focused studies present fresh perspectives on the development and contradictions of national identities, policy intentions, and knowledge production, and offer an interdisciplinary framework for continuing re-examination of the evolution of Iranian-American relations.
Individual papers present separate but interrelated work. Analyzing the presence of American non-state actors in Iran during the first half of the twentieth century, "The Ties that Bind" explores the strong role of personal relationships in shaping the evolution of inter-state relations. "Manifestations of Mission" interrogates the role of American evangelicals as self-identified missionaries and modernizers in the middle of the twentieth century, and their connections to the officially secular foreign policy mission of the US Cold War. "Iran's Rise and Rivalry with the US in the Middle East" explores the how Iran/US tensions since the 1979 revolution have shaped not only their policies

toward each other, but their competing interests and rival extensions into the Persian Gulf and Middle East region. “Tied Up in Tehran” presents a multi-faceted view from the intersections of American and Iranian identity of the intimate dynamics of gendered daily life in postrevolutionary Iran, and a reconsideration of how power functions through social and material forms. Together, these four studies address different scales of Iranian and American encounters, and the implications those encounters have for our understanding of continuing Iranian and American relations.

The Ties That Bind: U.S.-Iran Relations, 1905-1953

by Kelly Shannon / Institute for Middle East Studies, George Washington University / kelly.j.shannon@gmail.com

This paper presentation will provide an overview of the forthcoming book, The Ties That Bind: U.S.-Iran Relations, 1905-1953, under contract with Columbia University Press. This book examines the foundations of the American-Iranian relationship during the first half of the 20th century, from the Constitutional Revolution through the 1953 coup, a period that remains underexplored by foreign relations historians. Drawing on multi-national, multilingual archival research, this book examines the roles not only of official diplomatic contacts, military conflict, economics, oil, and strategic concerns, but also of women and gender, empire, ideology, religion, humanitarianism, modernization and economic development, cultural perceptions, race, and non-state actors. The book also analyzes the U.S.-Iran relationship in its international context. By examining the multiple levels of American-Iranian engagement and emphasizing the half century before 1953, this project offers new insight into the history of U.S.-Iran relations. My research demonstrates how American and Iranian citizens developed deep ties and how non-state actors disproportionately influenced how the U.S.-Iran relationship took shape. Because Iranians' and Americans' early encounters with one another were generally positive, this period was largely one of transnational friendship - a friendship which the United States ultimately squandered. I demonstrate that Americans’ early encounters with Iran led the country to become a primary site for the expansion of U.S. influence, ultimately – but not inevitably – as the testing ground for Cold War interventionism in 1953 that became a model for covert operations elsewhere. I argue that American-Iranian engagement, through both “hard” and “soft” power interactions, in the first half of the 20th century indelibly influenced the rise of nationalism and modernization in Iran, Iranian movements for democracy and national sovereignty, the expansion of U.S. influence in the Middle East, and the ways Iranians and Americans perceived each other going forward.

Tied Up in Tehran: Perspectives on Women, Social Change, and Politics of Daily Life

by Norma Claire Moruzzi / University of Illinois at Chicago / nmoruzzi@uic.edu

This presentation provides an overview of my book, Tied Up in Tehran: Women, Social Change, and the Politics of Daily Life in Postrevolutionary Iran (Cambridge University Press, October 2025). Utilizing an unusual insider/outsider research perspective, the book uses the prism of everyday life to explore the multiple contradictions of Iran’s vibrant postrevolutionary society. Arriving in Iran as an American arous farangi in the 1990s, my engagement with Iran and Iranians was an extended learning experience, informed by curiosity, affection, and my critical perspective as an academic researcher. The resulting book, based on ten years of field work and twenty years of extended research and writing, emerged out of that long process: a self-reflexive experience of interpreting both Iranian daily life and my own presumptions of the apparently foreign or familiar.

The book’s title refers to a home invasion involving tangerines, norms of hospitality, and the sharp realities of urban real estate transformations. Chapters focus on separate but intersecting aspects of daily life: generational tensions, changes in family structure, practices of cultural intimacies, and challenges to gender roles in relation to both traditional and consumer culture. Against the backdrop

of political deadlock and economic insecurity, Iranians have been working out new combinations of old cultural identities and practices, negotiating between idealistic promises of change and the shifting foundations of established social structures. Combining narrative explication with interdisciplinary analysis, Tied Up in Tehran attempts to provide an intervention into mainstream assumptions about Iran, and contemporary theoretical debates about how power is experienced, manifested, and transformed.

Mission Manifest: American Evangelicals and Iran in the Twentieth Century
by Matthew Shannon / University of South Carolina / matthew.k.shannon@gmail.com
In this presentation, I will discuss my most recent book, Mission Manifest: American Evangelicals and Iran in the Twentieth Century, which was published by Cornell University Press as part of its "United States in the World Series" in 2024. This book takes a distinctly transnational approach to understanding the relationship between "mission" and place" in mid-twentieth century Iran – mainly Tehran.
While the activities of Presbyterian missionaries in Iran during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century – Alborz College, as an example – is known, the history of American evangelicals in mid-twentieth-century Iran is less known. Mission Manifest, and, by extension, this presentation, examines the period between the 1940s and 1960s and explores the ways in which the religious mission of Presbyterian missionaries intersected with the larger American and Iranian "missions" during the eras of the Second World War and early Cold War.
Until 1965, the Presbyterian Church of the USA's "Iran Mission" ran churches and a variety of other institutions. An examination of this Iran Mission during the mid-twentieth century offers insight into the multiple worlds of "mainline" evangelicalism in the American and Iranian contexts. On the one hand, the Presbyterians in Iran were evangelicals, committed to church-planting and religious organizing. On the other hand, missionaries ran development programs, schools, cultural associations and other seemingly "modern" institutions that facilitated dialogue between people of different national, religious, and linguistic backgrounds. These are the various manifestations of the shared Presbyterian, American, and Iranian / Pahlavi missions that are identified and analyzed in Mission Manifest and, therefore, form the basis of this presentation.

Iran's Rise in the Middle East and its Ramifications
by Mohsen Milani / University of South Florida, Tampa / milani@usf.edu
This presentation analyzes Iran's regional strategy since 1979 and its long-standing rivalry with the United States. It examines Tehran's use of asymmetric tools—proxy networks, ideological narratives, and strategic alliances—to extend its influence across Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, and Gaza. While Iran succeeded in building a broad regional footprint, its rise is increasingly constrained by international pressure, internal unrest, and contradictions in its approach to power projection. The presentation explores how Iran is recalibrating its posture in the aftermath of key turning points, including the 2023 Gaza war and the twelve-day war between Iran and Israel/the United States, and considers the implications for U.S. policy and regional stability in a shifting Middle East.

Room 2.18

119. Beyond Sharia: The Role of Sufism in Shaping Islam II

Chair: Asghar Seyed-Gohrab

This panel examines the emergence, flourishing and lasting appeal of various non-conformist movements such as wise-fools, qalandars, and malamatis in Islamic intellectual history from the 10th century to the present day. Each paper examines how these antinomian hierarchies in the Islamic society challenged, redefined or sometimes rejected Islamic canonical law through questions they posed in their poetic, philosophical and political writings and teachings. The works and the reception

history of poets such as Niẓāmī, Khayyām, ʿAṭṭār, Rūmī, and Kaygusuz Abdāl (lit. 'Carefree dervish') are the focus of this panel. In the early Islamic period renunciative and ascetic movements emerged, reacting to the luxurious lives of Muslims, questioning what true Islam and a true Muslim are. Asceticism was a demonstrative rejection of what the ascetics considered to be a corrupt society, and a way to protect their own piety from the dangers of hypocrisy. The papers in this panel demonstrate the role of various non-conformist hierarchies in society by examining the works of several major Persian poets.

Crafting Sufi Authority: Kaygusuz Abdal in the Mirror of the Menâkıbnâme
by Leila Rahimi Bahmany / LMU München / leila.rahimibahmany@gmail.com
This book brings the 14th–15th-century Sufi poet Kaygusuz Abdal to life through his prose-poetic hagiography (Menâkıbnâme). It shows how, decades after Kaygusuz Abdal´s death, an anonymous hagiographer drew on diverse hagiographical traditions and employed narrative strategies to craft his enduring spiritual authority. Through this portrayal, the work established Kaygusuz Abdal´s foundational legacy within the Alevi-Bektashi order.
Leila Rahimi Bahmany´s book, Crafting Sufi Authority: Kaygusuz Abdal in the Mirror of the Menâkıbnâme, examines the image of the 14th–15th-century Sufi poet Kaygusuz Abdal as constructed in his prose-poetic hagiography (Menâkıbnâme). Kaygusuz Abdal, the venerated founder of Alevi-Bektashi literature in Anatolia, is a figure of profound cultural and religious significance. The study analyses the narrative strategies, the network of hagiographical elements drawn from various mystical traditions, and the appropriation techniques employed by the unknown hagiographer to craft a spiritual authority for Kaygusuz Abdal.

ʿAṭṭār and the role of the Wise-Fools in his works
by Amin Ghodratzadeh / Utrecht University / a.ghodratzadeh@uu.nl
In Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār's works (ca. 1145- ca. 1221), the character of the Wise-Fool plays an important role, presenting fascinating paradoxes challenging traditional notions of wisdom, folly, and piety. Exploring the significance of these characters in ʿAṭṭār's works provides us with insight about their function. One of the central themes in the stories is the value of humility, ascetism (zuhd), and piety in seeking wisdom. The Wise-Fools exemplify this virtue by abandoning pride and embracing simplicity. They become transmitters of heavenly knowledge by rejecting social norms and material attachments, allowing them to discern realities beyond the comprehension of ordinary people. Therefore, they challenge conventional wisdom and societal norms. Through their unconventional behavior and wisdom, they confront other characters to question the limitations of conventional knowledge and the true essence of wisdom, opening readers' minds to unusual viewpoints breaking down the walls of dogma.

Normativity in Islamic Studies and the Paradoxes of the Persianate
by Matthew Lynch / Oregon State University / matthew.lynch@oregonstate.edu
The study of Persianate iterations of Islam offers a deep well of resources for the Islamic Studies scholar. Centuries of theological, literary, and cultural production in the Persian language indicate the ongoing grappling with the legacies of earlier periods of Islam's development. However, Persianate Islamic traditions can pose unique difficulties for the discipline, as its progenitors often depart from historical and contemporary notions and practices of normative Islam. Persianate Sufi and mystical authors, including Rumi, Hafez, and others articulate conceptions of spiritual authority, divine communication and inspiration that push on the boundaries of sharia-based formulations of what 'true' Islam is and should be. Scholars engaged in Islamic traditions encounter paradoxes in studying these authors as they attempt to explain their emic formulations of Islam that run against the

normative and 'mainstream' conceptions of Islam—and thus form a paradoxical dilemma for Islamic Studies in the academy.
This presentation examines some of the challenges posed by the Persianate that have emerged within Islamic Studies. Referencing scholars writing from within Islamic traditions, including Mohamed Arkoun, Aysha Hidayatullah, Abdolkarim Soroush, and Shahab Ahmed, the presentation demonstrates the ongoing grappling within Muslim academic discourse about normativity. Drawing further insights from the approaches of Carl W. Ernst, Kecia Ali, Matthew Melvin-Koushki, Aaron Hughes, and Candace Mixon, I situate the study of Persianate Islam within ongoing debates about the potentials and boundaries of Islamic studies and the roles that scholars, both Muslim and non-Muslim, play in negotiating how, and whether, we can ever move 'beyond sharia.'

Room 2.19

120. Faith, Culture, and Their Interplay in Iranian Artistic and Literary Traditions

Chair: Shekoufeh Mohammadi Shirmahaleh

This interdisciplinary panel focuses on the multiple ways religion and culture interact and on the manifestations of this interaction in art and literature. Religion emerges within culture while also acting as one of its most complex sources of inspiration. The interplay of religion and culture is therefore a dynamic relation that unfolds through faith, ritual, politics, and socio-economic contexts, producing results as variable as its means of expression.
By tracing continuities and ruptures from antiquity to the present, the papers in this panel examine how Iranian literary and artistic traditions have both reproduced and resisted religious discourses. From pre-Islamic cosmologies and Shiʿi taʿziya to classical poetry and contemporary cinema, the discussions highlight how art and literature have provided spaces for negotiating grief, authority, and communal identity. The panel opens a space for dialogue about how the literary and artistic traditions of Iranian territories have been influenced by different religions, and how religion itself has been reshaped through cultural practices and artistic materialization.

From kīš to dād: reflections on a religious conflict in Ferdowsi's Shahnameh

by Shekoufeh Mohammadi Shirmahaleh / Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas, UNAM / smohammadi@comunidad.unam.mx

The most important, although indirect, source of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh, the Sassanid Xudāynāmag, was composed with clear political intentions: to satisfy the need for a solid Persian identity that not only would survive threats of all kind, but could also provide durable legitimacy to a state strongly bound to religion. Therefore, Sassanian Zoroastrianism structured the epic legends of the Xudāynāmag and gave different Iranian peoples' old mythological beliefs the unifying shape of the sixth century Persian perspective.
Composing his Shahnameh, Ferdowsi conserved a great deal of the original structure that had become accessible to him through previous Shahnamehs, but he did not doubt to make significant changes in favor of a more humanistic version of the legends. Through poetic creativity and the arts of rhetoric, he managed to partly liberate the stories from the weight of Sassanian Zoroastrianism and give them back their diverse nature: diversity in faith, language and ethnicity.
In this paper, I will focus on two specific passages of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh: the legend of the first two kings, Gayūmart and Hūšang. Through a philological analysis of the use of the words "kīš" and "dād" I will suggest some guidelines for a counterhegemonic reading of these fragments, based on the poet's own rebellious and liberating intentions, materialized in his work through literary and semiotic strategies.

Taʿziyeh Beyond Faith: The Theatrical Body and the Transformation of Ritual in Iranian Cultural Memory

by Maryam Palizban / Affiliated Member, CERES – Ruhr-Universität Bochum/ Independent Researcher, Berlin / ritual.nara@gmail.com
This paper reconsiders Taʿziyeh not merely as a religious ritual, but as an autonomous theatrical form that generates its own language of presence, emotion, and memory. Emerging from Shiʿi mourning traditions, Taʿziyeh has long been interpreted through the lens of faith and devotion. Yet its structure—embodied performance, spatial transformation, and the coexistence of spectators and mourners—reveals a deeper affinity with theatre itself: a site where collective memory is re-enacted, translated, and continually reimagined.
Drawing from my artistic and academic research, I approach Taʿziyeh as a performative archive that transforms theological content into aesthetic and affective experience. In this sense, it transcends the boundaries of religion, opening a space where belief becomes gesture, and doctrine turns into emotion. This perspective allows us to see Taʿziyeh not as a fixed religious form, but as a dynamic cultural practice that has profoundly shaped Iranian visual and performative arts—from theatre to cinema—by reconfiguring how the sacred is embodied and remembered.

Twilight of Tales: The Real and the Imaginary in Iran, 1850s–1920s
Jaleh Ebrahimi

Five Prominent Archetypes in Persian Folktales Present in Modern Beliefs of Iranian People
Mahboubeh Khorasani

18:15 – 19:15 **Leeuwenbergh**

Keynote Janet Afary

Servaasbolwerk 1a, Utrecht

"On the 120th Anniversary of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution: Reflections from Diaspora"

8:30-10:30 Janskerkhof 2/3

Room 0.13

121. Iranian Engagement with Asia and Latin America in Late Qajar and Early Pahlavi Times

Chair: Houchang Chehabi

Discussant: Roham Alvandi

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Iran was one of only six non-Western states to have maintained its formal independence. This independence was fragile, vulnerable to European encroachment. Iranian statesmen, diplomats, and intellectuals naturally paid attention mostly to Europe, aiming to keep imperialism at bay. However, they were also aware of the fact that Iran was not the only country in such a precarious situation. This panel throws light on Iranians' engagement, both intellectual and diplomatic, with the non-European world, specifically Asia and Latin America, in the period between the Constitutional Revolution and the onset of the Second World War.

The first two papers are directly complementary as they focus on Iranians' perceptions of the outside world during and after the Constitutional Revolution. Mexico and China underwent revolutions roughly at the same time, in 1910 and 1911, respectively, and Iranian intellectuals engaged with these revolutions in the press, comparing them to their own experience.

The third and fourth papers take us to the period after the First World War, when Iran, having in extremis survived as a sovereign state, began to engage diplomatically with the world beyond Europe. The third paper discusses the role of China, Japan and Turkey within the global imaginaries of the Iranian polity at the end of the war, while the fourth analyzes Iran's interventions at the League of Nations, where, as the only Muslim member state before 1932, its representatives defended both pan-Islamic and pan-Asian positions.

Revolutionary Mexico in the Eyes of Post-Constitutional Iran

by Leonardo Alaghband / University of Cambridge / lalagh@icloud.com

Having only been established in 1902/3, formal diplomatic relations between Iran and Mexico saw a lull from the outbreak of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (1905–1911). Formal relations were suspended in 1928 when the newly founded Pahlavi Dynasty (1925–1979) abolished foreign capitulations and were only restored when a new treaty of friendship was signed in 1937. Both countries saw great turmoil during this period (1903–1937) as both went through anti-imperial revolutions, subsequent attempts at state building, rebellions, and, in Iran's case, foreign occupation. Considering that there was little formal diplomatic exchange between the two countries, this paper instead examines the Iranian press's coverage of Mexico from the 1910s into the early 1920s, roughly coinciding with the armed phase of the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920). During this period, Mexico was of great interest to the Iranian reformist newspapers such as Iran-e Now, Chehrehnama, Habl al-Matin, Bahar, and Pars. These newspapers saw Mexico as being similar to Iran in terms of its civilizational pedigree, level of development, and geopolitical position. This paper proposes that this perspective enabled the Iranian reformist press to draw on Mexico's example, urging the Iranian people and government to resist foreign occupation during the First World War. Furthermore, this paper builds on the existing literature that compares the Iranian and Mexican Revolutions, histories of Iranian and Mexican diplomatic relations, and transnational histories of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution.

Mirrors in the East and West: Competitive Solidarities of Iran in the Global 1919

by Khosrow Tousi / SOAS, University of London / 657758@soas.ac.uk
This paper focuses on the discursive role of China, Japan and Turkey within the global imaginaries of the Iranian polity at the end of the First World War. Building on the discussions printed in the Iranian state's own press arm, I address this polity's complicated view of those Asiatic states as both civilizational equals within the hierarchies of the world order and competitors in the contemporaneous game of global development. At the dawn of the age of internationalism, as the world was moving towards a rhetoric of equality between "civilized" nations "both great and small," these states played a crucial role in the formation of Iran's self-image as an ailing non-European state still "unconquered" by Europe and offered a looking glass in which European imperial rivalries, inter-Asian aggression and the prospect of the post-war international order were all represented. The discourse further reflects Iran's clear understanding of the international order as a Eurocentric system of unequal integration and the centrality of the civilizational narrative for the Empire. The pairing of this understanding and a public discussion of the Turkish, Japanese and Chinese experiences, inter alia, informed Iran's response to the question of non-Europe's inclusion in the international order following the Great War, which involved of an intense diplomacy of cultural connotations that essentially de-centred the "standard of civilization" towards the East. Examining this moment of national crisis from the understudied angle of global internationalism will write Iran into the histories of the "Global 1919" as an active, perceptive participant and demonstrate how Asia and the Muslim world influenced Iranian engagements at the Paris Peace Conference and the subsequent League of Nations.

Iran and the Far Eastern Countries at the League of Nations: An Asian Solidarity?

by Leila Koochakzadeh / Inalco / leila.koochakzadeh@gmail.com
The political and diplomatic history of Iran in the 20th and 21st centuries can not be understood without taking into account its pan-Asian dimension. From the beginning of the century, Iranian elites sought to free themselves from Western interference by turning toward Asia as a horizon of solidarity and an alternative model of modernity. The Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905 marked an initial turning point: the victory of an Asian country over a major European power embodied, for Iran, a model of emancipation and resistance. Yet it was above all the First World War that acted as a decisive catalyst. Europe, long perceived as the incarnation of civilization, instead revealed its destructive face in a fratricidal conflict, prompting the Iranian elite to reject its exemplariness and to search for a path of progress more closely aligned with Iran's cultural and political realities. This moment fostered the emergence of an "Oriental" identity and the formation of a pan-Asian discourse, particularly visible in Iran's interventions at the League of Nations, where the country, the only Muslim state represented until 1932, defended both pan-Islamic and pan-Asian positions. Exploring this pan-Asian dimension requires drawing upon a wide-ranging corpus that remains largely neglected, from the Persian-language press published in Iran and its diaspora (Egypt, British India), to European archives and Iranian diplomatic speeches at the League of Nations. It is by examining these sources that one can fully grasp the depth of this strategic orientation and understand how, as early as the post–World War I era, it nurtured an Iranian conception of Eastern solidarity and resistance to the West.

China Through Iranian Eyes: Looking East in the Constitutional Era, 1901-1911

by William Figueroa / https://rug.academia.edu/WilliamFigueroa / w.a.figueroa@rug.nl
Before and during the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, intellectual and political debates among Iranians were deeply connected to developments in other countries. The influence of nearby states

in Europe and the Ottoman Empire is well documented, but other than a fascination with Japan, the impact of events in Asia, and especially China, is less explored. Despite the distance, changes in transportation and information technology meant that news about developments in China and their reception in Europe were increasingly accessible to Iranian readers. The relationship between China, Europe, and Japan was extensively commented on in newspapers like Bahar, Tarbiyat, and Habl al-Matin. Their reading of China reflected their own intellectual priorities and domestic political convictions. Covering topics ranging from China's relationship to Europe and Japan and modernization efforts to its culture, religion, and the status of women, China is configured either as either a victim of European colonialism or a model of how to avoid it. Directly or indirectly, these discussions contributed to a growing understanding of Iran as an Asian country, whose fate was tied to that of other colonized Asian nations, and reflect the intimate connection between international relations and domestic political and intellectual debates. By examining discussion in the Iranian press about China and modernization, this paper furthers our knowledge of the "both Eastern and Western" character of the intellectual history of modernity in Iran.

Room 0.17

122. On Consumption Across Persian & Arabic Sources

Chair: Ammar Farra, Riwa Roukoz

Our panel explores the theme of consumption from three angles: the fluctuating legal status of alcohol consumption in Safavid Iran, production and consumption of pre-modern Arabic historical chronicles about Sasanian Iran, and the all-consuming nature of passionate love as represented by female characters in pre-modern Arabic books on coitus that consolidate Islamic and Zoroastrian sources of wisdom. In each case, we seek to offer a perspective informed by our background as scholars of Arabic language & literature, reading across languages, temporalities, and genres. We thereby propose that consumption is a salient theme through which we can look at the relationship that ties the consumer and consumed, be it literal or physical. We attempt to theorize consumption at the threshold of Arab and Persian cultural production in the pre-modern and early modern period.

Alcohol bans, fermentation, and addiction in Safavid Iran

by Indran Fernando / University of Chicago / indran@uchicago.edu

In this paper, I treat Safavid Iran as a case study to understand how alcohol bans are made unstable by biological, neuropsychological, economic, and political factors: the ease of fermentation, withdrawal syndrome, supply and demand, and dynamic power relations between shahs and the ulama. I explore questions like the following: Can oscillations between the prohibition and legalization of alcohol be understood as a societal analogue to cycles of relapse? How did alcohol – when targeted through half-measure bans on public intoxication rather than production or sale – contribute to a notion of the public sphere? I seek to build upon Rudi Matthee's paradoxical insight in The Pursuit of Pleasure that "The ulema [...] might excoriate the existence of vice but that same vice served to validate their existence and role as guardians of virtue" (297). In contrast to Matthee, however, I focus less on the agency of the clergy or the shahs, but rather approach alcohol and yeast as historical actors in their own right. It is from this perspective that I will reassess relevant Persian primary sources cited by Matthee in Angels Tapping at the Wine-Shop's Door: Qummi, Khulāsat al-tavārikh; Rumlu, Ahsan al-tavārikh; Qazvini, Javāhir al-akhbār; Bayg, Takmilat al-akhbār; Qazi b. Kashif al-Din Muhammad, Jām-i jahān-nāma; Husayni, Tārikh-i Shāh Safi; Qazvini, Tārikh-i jahān-ārā-yi 'Abbasi; and Nasiri, Dastūr-i shahriyārān.

Consuming Passion: The Persian Wise Woman in Arabic Erotic Texts

by Riwa Roukoz / University of Chicago / riwaroukoz@uchicago.edu

This paper looks into the role of Persian sources and hearsay anecdotes in premodern Arabo-Islamic erotic compendiums of the 10th century CE. In the economy of Arabic prescriptivist anecdotes and obscene poetry illustrative of intimate and affective imaginations surrounding female desires, these adab compilations, drawing on earlier Greek, Sanskrit and Persian sources, generously depict female pleasure from the perspective of women 'narrators'. Particularly drawing from the latter tradition, the designated wise women, though often characters of historical fiction as Pernilla Myrne suggests, play a rhetorical role across the mono-thematic interests of books on coitus (kutub al-bāh). While women figures, named and unnamed, often speak for themselves in both prose and poetic verse, the paper looks into the distinctions between Persian and Arab lineages of wisdom that the sources intend to represent. In other words, what is the Persian tradition depicted to bring to the Arabic adab compendium that is not present or similarly illustrated by other Arab sources, specifically through the images of wise women? Conversely, what depictions of consuming passionate love do the Persian women characters come to affirm? And in parallel, what does it mean that the traces of such sources only remain present in Arabic-language compendiums? It is clear that Persian anecdotal sources are employed to co-construct and inform ẓarf and the requisites of the ẓarīf (the learned reader), both man and woman. However, the Persian women protagonists, often presented as sex experts, consolidate Islamic notions of shahwa with Zoroastrian perspectives on desire. In such narration, hyperboles are central literary devices for establishing a hierarchy of desires, reinstating the authorial power of women's needs and simultaneously legitimizing the protagonist's own fictional subjecthood. More than sites of postulating gendered expectations in man-woman relationships, the anecdotal advice make up instances of queer literary frottage between the wise woman and her advisee.

Philology, History, and Islamic Thought in *Nahj al-Balāgha*: A Study of a Sermon and its Commentators

by Ammar Farra / University of Chicago / afarra@uchicago.edu

Room 0.19

123. Constraint and Creation: Contemporary Persian Literature and Iranian Cinema as Sites of Social Transformation

Chair: Kamran Talattof, Mehrak Kamali Sarvestani

This multidisciplinary panel examines how literary and cinematic works function as agents of social transformation in modern and contemporary Iranian culture. Moving beyond representational analysis, the panel investigates how cultural artifacts actively participate in shaping collective consciousness, negotiating political constraints, and articulating evolving conceptions of identity and belonging. The presentations explore the dynamic relationship between aesthetic innovation and historical necessity, demonstrating how creative expression emerges from—and responds to—the sociopolitical conditions of its production. Rather than positing simple cause-and-effect relationships, the panel considers cultural works as sites where private reflection and public engagement intersect, where artistic constraint breeds innovation, and where individual voices coalesce into broader narratives of resistance, adaptation, and transformation.

The panel brings together four presentations spanning pre-revolutionary poetry to contemporary diasporic fiction. One presentation examines how post-revolutionary censorship made the child's perspective a cinematic necessity in Majid Majidi's acclaimed films, demonstrating how constraint generated aesthetic innovation. Another analyzes how descriptive realism in 1980s Persian fiction offered an alternative to political militancy, sustaining literature as the voice of the powerless. A third explores Batul Azizpur's pre-revolutionary poetry, which theorized verse circulation as analogous to revolutionary mobilization. Finally, a presentation traces the evolution of "home" across three generations of Iranian fiction—from national space to internal exile to diaspora—revealing how

literature negotiates belonging amid displacement. Together, these analyses illuminate how Iranian cultural producers have transformed censorship, exile, and historical rupture into creative possibility.

Cinema of Necessity: How Children's Perspectives Emerged in Post-Revolutionary Iranian Film

by Joonhwan Choi / University of Arizona / cosmophile@arizona.edu

Majid Majidi, one of Iran's most celebrated filmmakers known for his humanistic portrayals of everyday life, has significantly contributed to shaping contemporary Iranian cinema through his distinctive approach to children's films. Rather than simply producing content aimed at young audiences, Majidi uses children's perspectives as a compelling lens to explore the intricacies of Iranian society. Among his nine feature films, five center on children, including his internationally acclaimed works Children of Heaven (1997) and The Color of Paradise (1999), which have garnered numerous awards at prestigious film festivals.

While existing scholarship has examined Iranian cinema's post-revolutionary transformation, the broader cultural and political conditions that elevated the child's viewpoint to prominence have received comparatively little attention. After the 1979 Revolution, strict censorship regulations limited the representation of adult intimacy, politics, and dissent, leading filmmakers to discover in the figure of the child a socially permissible yet emotionally resonant medium of expression. Majidi's work exemplifies how this necessity evolved into an aesthetic choice, in which innocence became a cinematic strategy to address sensitive social realities under constraint.

Drawing inspiration from Italian Neorealism, Majidi frames children's viewpoints as a purposeful narrative strategy tailored to Iran's unique filmmaking environment. Their innocent gaze allows him to navigate cultural and political boundaries with subtlety, addressing issues such as poverty, disability, family dynamics, and class disparity. This approach has since become a recognizable feature of Iranian cinema, giving it a distinctive voice within the global film landscape.

This research explores how Majidi's use of children's perspectives operates both as an artistic technique and as a creative response to censorship. By closely analyzing Children of Heaven and The Color of Paradise, the study investigates how these viewpoints enable layered social commentary while preserving poetic and moral coherence. Combining textual analysis with socio-cultural contextualization, the research sheds light on how Majidi's directorial decisions resonate with broader historical forces and continue to shape the aesthetic legacy of Iranian cinema.

Eight Stories and the Power of Detail: How Descriptive Realism Reshaped Iranian Literary Resistance

by Mehrak Kamali Sarvestani / The Ohio State University / kamalisarvestani.1@osu.edu

Eight Stories by New Generation of Iranian Writers (Hasht Dastan az Nevisandigan-i Jadid-i Iran) , published in 1984, fundamentally transformed the landscape of post-revolutionary Iranian literature by establishing descriptive realism as a powerful mode of political resistance. While previous scholarship has treated this collection merely as a historical document of literary transition, this article contends that its introduction by Houshang Golshiri, coupled with the innovative narrative strategies of three key contributors—Akbar Sarduzami, Mohammad Reza Safdari, and Ghazi Rabihavi—deliberately crafted a new paradigm of literary dissent.

This study challenges the conventional view that 1980s Iranian literature retreated from political engagement. Instead, it argues that these writers developed sophisticated forms of descriptive realism that proved more subversive than the overt political criticism of the previous decade. By analyzing their works through Harold Bloom's theoretical framework of "anxiety of influence" and "misreading," this paper demonstrates how these authors strategically reimagined their literary inheritance to create a seemingly apolitical aesthetic that paradoxically strengthened fiction's capacity for social critique. Their technique of detailed observation, far from being mere literary

ornamentation, emerged as a radical tool for documenting and preserving the experiences of the powerless, thereby establishing secular fiction as a vital counter-narrative to the period's dominant political discourse.
Keywords: Modern Persian Literature, Eight Stories, Descriptive Realism, The Powerless, Anxiety of Influence, Misreading, Houshang Golshiri, Akbar Sarduzami, Mohammad Reza Safdari, Ghazi Rabihavi, Harold Bloom

"I Untie the Knot of Fate from My Hair": Gendered Poetic and Revolutionary Agency in Batul ʿAzizpur's Revolutionary Poetry

by Eszter Melitta Szabo / University of Toronto / esztermelitta.szabo@mail.utoronto.ca

The poetry sections of literary periodicals circulating before and during the 1979 Iranian Revolution were filled with poems by women poets who, with few exceptions beyond well-known figures, have received little scholarly attention. While much revolutionary poetry of the period thematized the role of poetry itself, employed nature symbolism to express national renewal, or invoked Third World anti-colonial struggles, Batul ʿAzizpur's work reconfigured these conventions in a distinctly gendered register. Drawing on her poems published in progressive, left-leaning periodicals of the 1970s, as well as her collections Sheʿr-e āzādi [Poetry of Freedom] and Khvāb-e Leylā [Leyla's Dream], this paper explores how ʿAzizpur's verses both exemplify and expand the revolutionary aesthetics of the 1970s by engaging the symbolic, conceptual, and referential layers of her complex imagery. On the symbolic level, her poems fuse leftist stock images, surrealistic nature and body motifs, and gendered language of motherhood, often portraying women as "mothers of poetry." Conceptually, in poems ranging from intimate meditations to poetic variations of revolutionary slogans, she theorizes the place and agents of poetry and political change, often emerging from private spaces and propelled by unnoticed actors. Her use of gendered bodily metaphors—such as hair from which the woman poet unties the knot of fate—reimagines embodiment as both a medium and a metaphor for revolutionary awareness and liberation. Close readings of her metapoems will further illustrate how ʿAzizpur draws parallels between maternal and women poets' intellectual and creative labor: to write is to give life to ideas, a practice she extends from private and local contexts to a planetary scale through the universality of natural imagery and explicit references to Third World revolutionary locations. In doing so, she subverts the prevalent religiously-infused maternalist discourses of the Revolution and articulates a broader humanistic vision that transcends Iran's national borders.

From Homeland to Exile: Negotiating Identity, Belonging, and Home in the Novels of Simin Daneshvar, Zoya Pirzad, and Hamed Esmaeilion

by Parvaneh Hosseini / Ohio State University / hosseini.39@osu.edu

From Homeland to Exile: Negotiating Identity, Belonging, and Home in the Novels of Simin Daneshvar, Zoya Pirzad, and Hamed Esmaeilion

This paper offers a comparative analysis of identity, belonging, and home, and their intersections with reality and fantasy and body and soul, in the novels of Simin Daneshvar, Zoya Pirzad, and Hamed Esmaeilion. By examining Savushun (1969), I Turn Off the Lights (2001), and The Blue Toucan (2021), the study traces how Iranian fiction across three generations reimagines the idea of home as both a physical and psychological space shaped by historical change, gendered experience, and displacement. Through an intertextual reading of Savushun and I Turn Off the Lights, I explore how Zoya Pirzad's portrayal of Clarice, an Armenian-Iranian woman, extends and transforms Simin Daneshvar's Zari. Both women's lives unfold within domestic settings that mirror wider political and cultural anxieties. Yet while Zari's home in Shiraz reflects the collective wounds of occupation and tradition, Clarice's hybrid identity in Abadan introduces a subtle form of internal exile, where belonging and otherness coexist within the nation's boundaries. The paper then turns to Hamed

Esmaeilion's The Blue Toucan, which relocates this negotiation of selfhood and belonging to the diasporic landscape of post-2009 exile. Drawing on Homi Bhabha's concept of unhomeliness and Brian Keith Axel's theory of diasporic formations, I examine how Esmaeilion's novel constructs exile, trauma, and longing as shared transnational experiences. By placing these three novels in dialogue, the paper argues that Iranian literature maps an ongoing transformation of home—from the wounded homeland of Savushun, to the hybrid domestic interior of I Turn Off the Lights, and finally to the deterritorialized exile of The Blue Toucan—revealing how identity and belonging are continuously redefined in the movement between homeland, memory, and displacement.

Room 0.21

124a. Modern Iranian Intellectual History in an Age of Global History

Chair: Negin Nabavi, Assef Ashraf

Economic Thinking in Qajar-Era Political Thought
Assef Ashraf

Portrait of a Perso-Ottoman Intellectual at the 'Edge' of Empire: Hüseyin Daniş
Tanya Lawrence

Translation of Philosophy into Persian: Scholarship as Activism
Roman Seidel

Intellectual history was, for a long time, among the most vibrant fields in the scholarship on modern Iran, distinguished not just by the number of studies, but also by the force of their arguments. But the debates of the field have languished in recent years, as interest in intellectual history fell into abeyance, and attention shifted to other approaches and areas of inquiry.

Meanwhile, in the historical profession more broadly, intellectual history has experienced a resurgence. Following the global turn, the study of ideas and concepts has returned with vigour, with new journals and book series dedicated to what is now called global intellectual history.

The aim of this panel is to bring together scholarship on modern Iranian intellectual history that is informed by the global turn. Each of the papers in the panel addresses big themes in Iranian historiography—the intellectual production of émigré thinkers, the impact of European ideas in Iran, the emergence of new forms of thought—but by using underutilised sources or by asking fresh sets of questions.

The first paper focuses on Hüseyin Daniş, a Perso-Ottoman scholar and intellectual who lived his entire life in the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey, and considers the impact of his transition from imperial subject to national citizen upon the reception and circulation of his scholarship and thought. The second paper is on the translation of European philosophical texts into Persian, and questions how much this project should be construed only as a scholarly one. And the third paper explores the extent to which Iran's integration into global capitalist markets and economic forms of thinking informed Qajar-era political thought.

Taken as a group, the papers aim to revisit and rejuvenate classic debates of the field, and ultimately, bring Iranian intellectual history into closer conversation with global intellectual history.

Economic Thinking in Qajar-Era Political Thought

by Assef Ashraf / University of Cambridge / aa2098@cam.ac.uk

How and why did political thought change in nineteenth-century Iran? This is a classic question in Iranian historiography, and most scholars answer it by focusing on the emergence of new political ideas, like nationalism, constitutionalism, and liberalism in Iran. In explaining why these ideas emerged, meanwhile, they emphasise either the introduction of Western ideas into Iranian political discourse, or the influence of religious movements in Iran.

This paper revisits the question over nineteenth-century political thought by focusing on an understudied text: Dastur al-Aʿqab, written by Mirza Muhammad Mihdi 'Navvab' Tehrani in 1844. The editor of its published edition described Dastur al-Aʿqab as 'one of the earliest political treatises' and 'critical texts' of the Qajar period, and much of the text's critique is directed at the Qajar political system under the grand vizier Haji Mirza Aqasi, as well as those around him.
Two dimensions to the history of nineteenth-century political thought emerge in this paper. First, a reading of Dastur al-Aʿqab demonstrates that, in addition to Western ideas and religious trends, Iran's integration into global capitalist markets, and especially the opening of Iran to international trade in the early decades of the nineteenth century, had a profound impact upon political thinking. While much of Navvab Tehrani's attack is political in nature, it is grounded in a critique of the Qajar government's inability to stem the tide of cheap foreign goods entering Iran, or to help Iranian producers and merchants remain competitive in a global market.
This paper will also, however, situate Dastur al-Aʿqab in Qajar-era political and historical writing more generally. Doing this reveals how the text builds upon trends in economic thinking already underway in the early nineteenth century. The paper thus points to a broader, and neglected, point: the centrality of economic thinking in nineteenth-century political thought.

Portrait of a Perso-Ottoman Intellectual at the 'Edge' of Empire: Hüseyin Daniş
by Tanya Lawrence / University of St Andrews / tel2@st-andrews.ac.uk
By the turn of the 20th century, for the tens of thousands of Iranian émigrés in the Ottoman Empire, the Ottoman lands were home: and amongst these Perso-Ottoman subjects were some of the most renowned intellectuals and dissidents of Qajar Iran. Despite the fact that these Iranian émigrés spent considerable proportions of their careers in the Ottoman Empire, remarkably little information on their Ottoman lives is available.
This talk will focus on the 'last generation' of Iranian émigré-scholars in the Ottoman Empire in an attempt to reflect on the experience of their transition from subjects of Empire to citizens of a nascent nation-state. Zooming in on the career of one such Iranian émigré-scholar, Hüseyin Daniş, this talk will reflect on how, as the Ottoman Empire's 'longest century' drew to a close, Ottoman statesmen, intellectuals and public figures such as Abdülhak Hamid, Ahmet Midhat, Rıza Tevfik and Fuad Köprülü came to increasingly reflect on the Empire's relationship to Persian language, literature and culture.
Reflecting on the discussions in the Ottoman public domain on the Empire's engagement and relationship to Persian culture underline that the life trajectories of many of the last generation of Ottoman subjects were defined more by the gradual transformations in intellectual and cultural attitudes of those around them, rather than by major historical junctures: and for many in the Empire, including the Perso-Ottoman intellectual Hüseyin Daniş, transitioning from subject of Empire to citizen of the Republic involved partaking in those debates in the Ottoman public domain that came to question, challenge and redefine the Empire's relationship to its Eastern neighbour, Iran and all things Persian.

124b. Hidden Voices, Veiled Desires: Gender and Eroticism in Early Modern Persian Poetry
Chair: Paul E. Losensky
This panel brings together new research on gender, sexuality, and authorship in early modern Persianate literature, exploring how questions of intimacy, devotion, and literary form intersected with broader cultural, political, and religious currents. From Hilālī's Shāh va Darvīsh, a masnavī that foregrounds homoerotic romance between a prince and a Sufi, to Nethārī Ṭūnī's Sarv o Tazarv, with its veiled articulations of same-sex desire in the restrictive milieu of Safavid Iran, these papers situate homoeroticism not as marginal, but as core elements of the literary imagination. Alongside these

treatments of male intimacy, the panel also recovers the neglected voices of women writers, such as Shahrbānū Begum, whose versified ḥajj narrative illuminates the spiritual and literary contributions of Safavid women otherwise occluded in the canon. Taken together, these studies challenge prevailing narratives of absence, whether of homoerotic desire or of female authorship, by exploring how Persianate poets, both male and female, confronted questions of morality, orthodoxy, and authority through acts of aesthetic innovation. The panel demonstrates that romance, pilgrimage, and poetic experimentation were not peripheral, but central arenas in which Safavid-era writers reimagined desire, articulated devotion, and negotiated the terms of cultural and literary legitimacy.

Crossing Borders and Boundaries: Shahrbānū Begum and the Gendered Experience of Sacred Travel

by Maryam Moazzen / University of Louisville / m.moazzen@louisville.edu

The near absence of female poets in Safavid literary tadhkiras reflects not a lack of creative output but the cumulative effects of gendered exclusion in authorship, transmission, and literary historiography. Rather than indicating disinterest or absence, this silence results from structural barriers—restrictive gender norms, limited access to literary education and patronage, and male-dominated processes of canon formation—that obscured or erased women's contributions. As a result, female-authored works were often anonymized, misattributed, or omitted altogether, reinforcing their marginality in the cultural archive.

Recent scholarship has begun to recover the poetic voices of Safavid women, such as Parīkhān Khānum (d. 1578) and Mahīn Bānū, revealing the sophistication and scope of their literary production. Building on these efforts, this paper examines a rare example of gendered sacred travel writing: a versified ḥajj narrative by Shahrbānū Begum, the affluent widow of a Safavid munshī, likely composed during the reign of Shah Sulṭān Ḥusayn (r. 1694–1722). Through a comparative analysis of her work alongside that of Wahīb Hamadānī, a male contemporary who also versified his pilgrimage, this study explores how gender inflects the representation of spiritual experience, emotional expression, and narrative framing.

Shahrbānū Begum's account, which chronicles her journey through Safavid and Ottoman territories to Mecca and Medina, offers a rare window into women's mobility, religious devotion, and authorship in early modern Islamic society. By bringing her voice into dialogue with male-authored pilgrimage narratives, this study not only illuminates the gendered dimensions of sacred travel but also reconsiders the contours of literary authorship and spiritual expression in the Safavid world.

A Prince, a Sufi, and the Polysemous Eroticism of Hilālī's Shāh va Darvīsh

by Chad Lingwood / Grand Valley State University / lingwoch@gvsu.edu

Expressions of romantic relationships between royal figures, such as a prince, and a dervish or Sufi are not rare in classical Persian belles-lettres, especially poetry. Notable examples of this form of literary homoeroticism are found in the works of ʻAttār, namely his Asrār-nāma and Mantiq al-tair, in the Būstān and Gulistān of Saʻdī, and in Amīr Khusrau's Matlaʻ al-anvār, to name just a few. Less common are poems—particularly masnavis—whose entire narrative dwells on a love affair between two male figures. In the case of Shāh va Darvīsh, a Persian masnavī written by the Turkic poet Hilālī of Astarābād between 1499 and 1508, one finds this type of story. But, as this paper demonstrates, Shāh va Darvīsh is different than earlier (and much shorter) Persian iterations of the prince-and-Sufi romance. The paper thus explores the unique mystical and political significance of Hilālī's poem, including its ethical didacticism; and unlike other studies of Shāh va Darvīsh (of which there are relatively few), this paper neither ignores nor condemns the nature of the romance. It therefore challenges the assessments of Charles Rieu and Reuben Levy, who criticized Shāh va Darvīsh on moral grounds, and posits that Hilālī's poem contributes to ongoing discussions of same-sex

eroticism in premodern Islamicate literatures and societies. In this connection, attention is given to Hilālī's descriptions of love ('ishq) in relation to other Perso-Islamic explications of deep affection, like Sawānih al-'ushshāq by Ahmad al-Ghazālī. Lastly, the paper situates Shāh va Darvīsh amongst other Persian masnavīs of its era, such as Salāmān va Absāl, Sham' va Parvāna, and Bahrām va Bihrūz, to argue that this literary period was rich in terms of the creation of poignant romances whose narratives both entertained and edified audiences.

Recognising Plato's Kingdom in the Cataclysm of Greece episode in Amir Khusrau Dehalvi's Āʾīna-ye Sikandarī?

by Ankur Desval Fehrani / University of Cambridge / aa2588@cam.ac.uk

Completed in 1299, Amir Khusrau Dehlavi's narrative poem Āʾīna-ye Sikandarī ('Alexandrine Mirror') contains a long episode about a fictional island kingdom of Greece, ruled by the king of philosophers, Plato. When Alexander hears about their heretical philosophical beliefs, he decides to dig the isthmus and submerge the island kingdom under the ocean, bringing about the Cataclysm of Greece. This splendid diluvial episode is unique to Khusrau and without antecedent in the Persian Alexander tradition, as it does not appear in either Firdausi or Nizami, both being Khusrau's preeminent predecessors in the Eskandar-Nāma tradition.

However, a comparison with the extant Ancient Greek sources reveals some striking similarities between Khusrau's account of Plato's Kingdom of Philosophers and the mythical Atlantis as it appears in the Platonic dialogues Timaeus and Critias. Khusrau would likely have come across these in Arabic translations of these dialogues made during the great translation movement of Baghdad started by caliph al-Ma'mun (r. 813-33) in the ninth century, which brought much of Greek scientific and philosophical texts into Arabic. However, since there are no extant full Platonic dialogues in either Arabic or Syriac, this necessitates working directly with the original Greek

In this paper, I argue for Khusrau's direct usage of the aforementioned Platonic dialogues and shed light upon the extensive research which Khusrau did to compose his unique take on the Alexandreid or Eskandar-Nāma tradition in order to set it apart from his predecessors. Khusrau's work remains otherwise understudied, which has been an oversight in Classical Persian literary studies. This paper highlights the uniqueness of Khusrau's episode and elucidates his contribution to the whole of the Persian Alexander tradition.

Room 0.22

125. Echoes Across Borders: Persian Literature in Comparative Perspective

Chair: Ankur Desval Fehrani

This panel brings together four papers that situate Persian literature within comparative and global frameworks, highlighting how Persian texts resonate with, diverge from, or reconfigure literary traditions beyond Iran. This panel underscores its dynamic engagement with other literatures, from classical Greek philosophy to European modernism and American Southern fiction. Together, the papers explore how Persian authors adapt, challenge, and transform external influences in order to reflect their own cultural, social, and political realities.

The first paper turns to Amir Khusrau Dehlavi's Āʾīna-ye Sikandarī and its striking "Cataclysm of Greece" episode. Through a comparative reading of Khusrau's narrative with Plato's Timaeus and Critias, the study argues that Khusrau directly engaged with Platonic dialogues in Arabic translation, adapting them to Persian epic traditions. This work sheds light on overlooked cross-cultural exchanges in the medieval Persian literary world and emphasises Khusrau's originality in shaping the Alexander tradition.

The second paper offers a comparative study of Abbas Maroufi's Symphony of the Dead and William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury. It argues that both novels deploy fragmented, polyphonic forms to portray family decline as an allegory for national collapse. In each case, narrative form becomes a

mode of resistance to dominant historical myths, reflecting Iran's struggles with modernity and repression alongside the American South's confrontation with its aristocratic past.
The third paper examines irony in the short stories of Franz Kafka and Bahram Sadeghi, showing how the device functions differently across contexts: Kafka's irony emerges as tragic and existential, while Sadeghi's is socially grounded and satirical. This comparison demonstrates how Iranian fiction absorbs and reshapes European modernist strategies to critique its own society, negotiating the tensions between tradition, modernity, and reform.
Finally, the fourth paper analyses the construction of hybrid identity in contemporary novels by Iranian women writers, both within Iran and in the diaspora. Using postcolonial theory and computational methods, it traces how modernity and socio-political tensions shape narratives of belonging, exile, and ambivalence. This study highlights how Persian women's fiction engages with global literary and cultural debates on hybridity, displacement, and identity.
Taken together, the panel foregrounds Persian literature's place in global conversations, showing how it reflects, contests, and transforms external influences, from classical antiquity to modernist experimentation, while remaining deeply rooted in its own social and historical contexts.

Recognising Plato's Kingdom in the Cataclysm of Greece episode in Amir Khusrau Dehalvi's Āʾīna-ye Sikandarī?

by Ankur Desval Fehrani / University of Cambridge / aa2588@cam.ac.uk

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In this paper, I argue for Khusrau's direct usage of the aforementioned Platonic dialogues and shed light upon the extensive research which Khusrau did to compose his unique take on the Alexandreid or Eskandar-Nāma tradition in order to set it apart from his predecessors. Khusrau's work remains otherwise understudied, which has been an oversight in Classical Persian literary studies. This paper highlights the uniqueness of Khusrau's episode and elucidates his contribution to the whole of the Persian Alexander tradition.

Polyphonic Histories: Narrative Fragmentation, Collective Memory, and National Decline in Abbas Maroufi's Symphony of the Dead and William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury

by Farahnaz Orandi / Independent researcher / farahnaz.orandi1996@gmail.com

This paper investigates how Abbas Maroufi's Symphony of the Dead (1989) and William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury (1929) use fragmented, polyphonic narrative forms to transform the decline of individual families into allegories for broader social and historical collapse.
The central questions guiding this study are:
- How do these novels employ fractured time, shifting perspectives, and dissonant voices to reflect

collective memory and unresolved trauma?
- In what ways does form itself function as resistance to dominant cultural myths; the 'Lost Cause' narrative in Faulkner's American South, and the silences enforced by political repression in Maroufi's Iran?
- What does this comparative reading reveal about the place of Persian modern literature within the global modernist traditions?
While scholarship on Persian literature has often privileged exile and diasporic writing, the role of Persian modern novels within the international landscape of modernism has remained overlooked. At the same time, Faulkner's fiction has been extensively studied in relation to European and Latin American modernism, but rarely brought into dialogue with Iranian literature. Given that The Sound and the Fury served as a primary source of inspiration for the narrative style employed in the Symphony of the Dead, this study addresses both gaps by situating Maroufi alongside Faulkner, showing how narrative form becomes a site of cultural negotiation across distinct contexts.
The analysis draws on Maurice Halbwachs's theory of collective memory to interpret the family as a microcosm of national history, Paul Ricoeur's work on memory and narrative to frame the novels' fractured temporalities, Pascale Casanova's concept of the world republic of letters to highlight the dynamics of central and peripheral literatures, and Susan Stanford Friedman's theory of planetary modernisms to situate Maroufi within a more decentered global framework. Ultimately, the paper demonstrates how both writers deploy narrative fragmentation as an alternative archive; one that preserves suppressed histories, exposes unresolved traumas, and reflects the crises of the societies they depict.

Irony and Modern Consciousness in Franz Kafka's A Hunger Artist and Bahram Sadeghi's Mr. Novelist Is a Beginner

by Nadere Jaladat / Researcher and educator in literary theory, fiction literature, and semiotics. Interested in mythology, narrative structures, and comparative literature. Experienced in teaching and creative workshops for children and adult / jaladatnadere@gmail.com

The panel brings together four papers that situate Persian literature within comparative and global frameworks, highlighting how Persian texts resonate with, diverge from, or reconfigure literary traditions beyond Iran.
This study investigates the role of irony as both a narrative strategy and a mode of thought in Franz Kafka's A Hunger Artist and Bahram Sadeghi's Mr. Novelist Is a Beginner. Although rooted in distinct historical and linguistic traditions, both writers employ irony to expose the contradictions of modern existence and to question the artist's position within an indifferent society.
The research approaches irony not as a decorative device but as a reflective stance that creates distance between author and world. In Kafka's story, irony unveils the paradox of artistic devotion confronted with collective apathy; in Sadeghi's, it turns toward cultural self-critique, revealing the emptiness of repetitive literary conventions.
By reading these two works comparatively, the study seeks to highlight how irony becomes a shared language of modern consciousness—a means through which writers articulate doubt, alienation, and resistance. The analysis focuses on tone, narrative voice, and the shifting relation between writer, text, and reader.
While extensive scholarship exists on Kafka and Sadeghi separately, little attention has been paid to their converging use of irony as a form of constructive critique. The study will argue that irony in both cases functions as a creative force rather than pure negation: it dismantles false certainties while opening space for renewal and reflection. Through this perspective, the research contributes to broader discussions in comparative literature, demonstrating how irony operates as a trans-cultural bridge between European existentialism and Persian intellectual satire.

Echoes of a Fractured Home: A Computational Study of Hybrid Identity in Diasporic and Domestic Novels by Iranian women writers

by Elham Vatankhahan Esfahani / MA student in Linguistics, MA in Literary Theory and Criticism, BA in Persian Language and Literature / elham.vatankhahan@gmail.com

This paper investigates the construction of hybrid identity in four contemporary novels by Iranian women writers: two from within Iran—Fall Is the Last Season of the Year (2015) by Nasim Marashi and People from a Bygone Life (2024) by Fariba Vafi—and two by 1.5-generation diasporic authors—The Stationery Shop (2019) by Marjan Kamali and A Teaspoon of Earth and Sea (2013) by Dina Nayeri. Through comparative analysis, this study explores how modernity and socio-political tensions shape narratives of belonging and ambivalence across divergent experiences of place and displacement.

The research asks: Do women writers inside Iran articulate forms of hybrid identity comparable to those of their diasporic counterparts? And what semantic fields—such as home, exile, memory, and family—and affective patterns distinguish each group? More specifically, this study examines how frequently and in what contexts these themes emerge, and whether distinct narrative strategies characterize domestic versus diasporic negotiations of belonging.

To ground its findings, this analysis draws on Homi K. Bhabha's theory of hybridity, Stuart Hall's conception of cultural identity, and Sara Ahmed's work on affective politics, tracing how these authors negotiate and narrate in-betweenness through gendered experiences of revolution, displacement, and social transformation.

Methodologically, this study adopts an exploratory mixed-methods approach that integrates close reading with computational text analysis. Grounded in postcolonial and cultural theory, the analysis employs keyword extraction and topic modeling using pre-trained multilingual transformer models to identify thematic clusters and semantic patterns across the Persian and English texts. These computational techniques serve as discovery tools, revealing distributional patterns and thematic prominence that inform subsequent interpretive close reading. Crucially, the study does not train language-specific models but leverages existing multilingual architectures to enable cross-linguistic comparison while respecting each language's distinct literary and cultural registers.

Set against the backdrop of political unrest and globalized modernity, this pilot study anticipates finding shared ambivalences—domestic writers negotiating cultural-political loyalties within national boundaries, and 1.5 generation writers reconciling Iranian heritage with transnational pressures—while also revealing divergent affective registers and narrative strategies. By demonstrating the viability of computational approaches for comparative Persian-English literary analysis, this study offers a methodological framework for future research
in digital diaspora studies.

Room 1.09

126. The Role of Education in the Modernization Project of the Reza Shah Government

Chair: Saeede Soltanimoghadam

In the early decades of the 20th century, Iran underwent fundamental changes in education. These changes were part of the modernisation policies of the Reza Shah Pahlavi government. During this period, formal education was not merely a means of transmitting knowledge, but also a strategic tool for shaping a new social order, perpetuating the discourse of power and strengthening national identity.

Adopting an analytical-historical approach, this article seeks to answer the question of how educational transformations during Reza Shah's reign became a tool for achieving the government's modernisation objectives. To this end, it examines the expansion of schools, the establishment of Tehran University, the modification of curricula and the elimination of traditional educational

institutions, such as religious schools (Maktabkhaneh).
Research findings suggest that, during this period, the school was not just an educational institution, but also a means of training obedient, disciplined and patriotic citizens. It played a significant role in guiding the modern state-building project.

Theatre and Politics under Reza Shah
by Hasan Noori / Independent Researcher / hasannoori6565@gmail.com
This paper investigates the relationship between theatre and the modernization policies of Reza Shah Pahlavi's government. While the history of Iranian theatre in the early twentieth century has been documented, less attention has been paid to its political dimensions and its role in the state's nation-building project. My aim is to show how theatrical practices both reflected and shaped the cultural discourse of modernization.
The study focuses on three aspects of the theatre scene in the 1920s and 1930s: the formation of new theatrical groups and their connections to state cultural policies; the translation and performance of European plays and their influence on local aesthetics; and the institutionalization of theatre through official venues such as the Grand Hotel and emerging playhouses. In addition, I explore how certain productions engaged with themes of national history and identity, thereby aligning—sometimes explicitly, sometimes indirectly—with the nationalist ideology promoted by the state.
By examining archival materials, reviews, and selected scripts, the paper argues that theatre during Reza Shah's reign was not merely entertainment. It became a controlled yet dynamic space where modern values were staged, contested, and negotiated. This perspective sheds new light on the cultural politics of early Pahlavi Iran and highlights the complex role of performance in shaping public imagination.

Literary Reflections on Modern Educational Discourse in Reza Shah's Iran
by Sara Shafiezadeh Garousi / Independent Scholar / garoosisara86@gmail.com
This paper investigates the ways modern educational discourse during the rule of Reza Shah Pahlavi was reflected and interrogated in Persian literature. Most of the literature on this period has focused on the history of educational reforms—building schools, establishing the University of Tehran, and the collapse of traditional educational institutions. Much less attention has been paid to the ways of responding to these changes provided by fiction. My contention here is that literature serves not only as a sign of modernity but also as a site for its critique. The case in point is the works of three prominent writers: Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh, Sadeq Hedayat, and Bozorg Alavi. Sitirical in nature, Jamalzadeh's stories highlight the gulf of the educated and the illiterate. Hedayat, by contrast, grapples with the paradoxes of modernity imposed by the state, often advocating that the reforms did not resolve the fundamental structural issues in society. Alavi's socially conscious narratives demonstrate how new forms of collective consciousness emerging from the politically charged new educational institutions.
Taken together, these works suggest that the literature of the 1920s and 1930s was not a passive reflection of state policies. Instead, it functioned as an active arena where questions of cultural identity and the very notion of progress were contested. Viewing the period this way reveals the deep interconnections between education, politics, and literature in early twentieth-century Iran
Keywords: Reza Shah, Modernization, Education, Literature, Jamalzadeh, Hedayat, Alavi

Negotiating Tradition and Modernity: Women's Education Policies During Reza Shah Pahlavi's Era
by Hamideh Mohammadi / Independent Researcher / agost.6423@gmail.com

During Reza Shah Pahlavi's reign, the modernization of women's education became a central component of state-led social reforms. This paper critically examines the social attitudes and governmental policies regarding female education in Iran during this period. Historical documents reveal a decisive shift away from traditional views that had limited girls' education to private tutoring at home due to religious and social constraints. Under Reza Shah's modernization agenda, the state actively expanded public girls' schools and introduced new curricula aimed at combining academic knowledge with practical and moral training.
Girls' schools functioned as institutions equivalent to upper primary education, where alongside academic subjects, students received instruction in hygiene, household management, sewing, childcare, and moral conduct. Notably, new laws on school hygiene institutionalized the teaching of personal and environmental cleanliness, emphasizing bodily hygiene beyond mere appearance.
These reforms reflected a broader vision in which women were considered essential social connectors, prepared to participate in public life while maintaining prevailing social norms.
This study analyzes official policies, educational materials, and contemporary social responses, highlighting the complex negotiation between tradition and modernity in shaping women's education during Reza Shah's era.

Room 1.10

127. New Perspectives on the Iranian Revolution

Chair: Siavush Randjbar-Daemi

The three papers in this panel seek to provide new perspectives on hitherto overlooked and unexplored aspects of the Iranian Revolution of 1977-79 . They provide insight into provincial history by focusing on the developments during 1978-79 in a politically-restive province such as Gilan, examine how the Rastakhiz Party faced growing political unrest while its internal divisions exacerbated the institutional crisis of the Pahlavi regime and provide an overview of the activities of the first element of the Iranian Left to emerge into the public scene in autumn 1978 and the impact of its statements and declarations in the evolution of the debate over the nature of the successor state to the Pahlavi monarchy.
The papers are based on the presenters' core research in recent years, and mostly make use of unexplored primary sources in Persian and European languages.

Actors, Classes, and Provincial Divergence: Revolutionary Mobilization in Gilan, 1978–79

by Misagh Javadpour / University of Amsterdam / misagh.javadpour@gmail.com

This paper contributes to the panel's exploration of new perspectives on the Iranian Revolution by offering a provincial lens on revolutionary mobilization. It reexamines the Revolution of 1978–79 through the case of Gilan—a northern province long associated with leftist traditions yet politically quiescent in early 1978—to show how national revolutionary dynamics unfolded unevenly beyond Iran's central arenas.
While much of the historiography privileges national or metropolitan narratives, this study situates Gilan within the broader analytical frame of revolutionary diffusion and regional divergence, asking how structural, institutional, and class-specific factors shaped the timing and form of mobilization. Drawing on SAVAK reports, local newspapers, memoirs, and oral histories, it explores how key actors commonly identified as central to Iran's revolution—clerics, bazaaris, students, workers, and the urban poor—played markedly different and uneven roles in Gilan's context.
Unlike most central provinces—where alliances between clerics, bazaaris, and urban protest networks fostered early revolutionary repertoires—Gilan's large rural population, relatively stable agrarian economy, and cautious clerical establishment limited initial unrest. The post-Siahkal repression had dismantled leftist networks, leaving a political vacuum gradually filled by young religious activists, students, and teachers who organized through informal, trust-based networks.

These actors provided the connective tissue linking the province to Khomeini's movement, often without clerical or bazaar endorsement.
By late 1978, as revolutionary conditions intensified nationwide, new actors—guilds, workers, and public employees—entered the stage, and Gilan began to mirror, in attenuated form, the broader national coalition. Yet this convergence remained partial: the bazaar–clergy alliance never materialized, workers and employees mobilized only briefly, and many rural communities and local elites resisted revolutionary alignment.
The paper thus challenges Tehran-centered historiography, demonstrating that the revolution's social foundations were neither uniform nor simultaneous but contingent, locally negotiated, and regionally diverse.

The Gathering Storm: The Rastakhiz Party Facing Revolutionary Turmoil (November 1977–October 1978)

by Salomé Michel / Kiel University / michel@islam.uni-kiel.de

This paper explores the early unfolding of the revolution from the perspective of Iran's single party, the Hezb-e Rastakhiz-e Mellat-e Iran, up to its dissolution in October 1978, examining how revolutionary unrest affected the party's organisation, leadership, and political line. Rastakhiz, already facing harsh criticism, confronted a new challenge when the Shah announced the creation of a faza-ye baz-e siyasi. The party sought to position itself as the embodiment of this 'open political space', yet its leaders failed to agree on how to accommodate political change amid growing popular discontent.
Drawing on Rastakhiz publications, party archives, oral histories, and foreign diplomatic sources, this paper addresses three aspects of the party's reaction to revolutionary turmoil. First, it argues that Rastakhiz drastically misestimated the strength of opposition currents. Until early 1978, the party's overriding concern was the "leftist and western neocolonial dangers", while it remained convinced that clerical opposition could be rallied, even attempting to recruit clerics in a special committee in September 1977. Second, the paper reconstructs Rastakhiz's day-by-day account of Iran's deteriorating situation and its attempts at counter-mobilising the population. Finally, it explores the cacophony of responses within the party: while some advocated liberalisation and compromise, others called for strong—even violent—repression. Local cadres' criticism echoed that of former opponents (from the National Front, Pan-Iranist, or Toilers parties) elected to parliament under the Rastakhiz banner in 1975. Factional rivalries between Rastakhiz's wings and competition among its leaders, combined with the Shah's indecisive stance toward the party, further deepened fragmentation and fostered secessions.
This paper highlights the diffuse and antagonistic nature of political agency within the Pahlavi regime on the eve of the revolution. Reading elite fragmentation and popular mobilization as interconnected dynamics, it complements accounts of the revolution focused on political opposition and mobilization 'from below' by elucidating the circumstances of the simultaneous disintegration 'from within'.

The Ettehad-e Demokratik-e Mardom-e Iran and the Iranian Revolution, 1978-79

by Siavush Randjbar-Daemi / University of St Andrews / srd5@st-andrews.ac.uk

This paper will discuss the emergence and initial phase in the activities of the Ettehad-e Demokratik-e Mardom-e Iran, a leftist formation headed by the prominent writer Mahmoud Etemadzadeh (Beh Azin) which was founded in autumn 1978. The first organised element of the Iranian Left to engage in non-clandestine political activity inside Iran during the revolutionary unrest of 1978-79, the Ettehad sought to bridge the Tudeh Party background of its founders and its perceived role as the public wing of Tudeh activities inside the country with other trends within the revolutionary movement, such as

attempts within the Fadai-ye Khalq Organisation to mimic its structure and produce an overt front organisation. The Ettehad also provided the first in-depth manifesto containing proposals on the structure and outlook of the post-monarchical state system in the autumn of 1978.
This talk will discuss the pattern of formation and public presence of the Ettehad by drawing upon hitherto unexplored memoirs of its founders and the publications and declarations it produced between foundation in October 1978 and the end of the first phase of its activities in March 1979. It will in particular assess the Ettehad's proposals in terms of the relationship between religion and politics, the outlook of the future state in both international relations and domestic politics and discuss the extent to which its ideas gained traction within both the Iranian Left and the broader political scene of the time, particularly with regards to the later trajectory of the Tudeh Party during the early post-revolutionary stage.

Room 1.17

128. Unions with the Supernatural in Popular Persian Literature and Devotional Drama

Chair: Babak Rahimi, Sara Khalili Jahromi

Connecting to the unseen world through marital bonds, or by giving birth to a child with a supernatural parent, are recurring motifs in mythological, folkloric and religious narratives. This bond ranges from divine to diabolic, miraculous to cursed. This panel investigates the treatment of supernatural unions in Persian vernacular narratives, tracing how relationships between humans and divine, diabolic, or fairy-like figures appear across folk literature, in popular retellings of religious stories, and in devotional drama. It draws upon three interconnected genres: folk tales, Qisas al-Anbiya' (Stories of the Prophets), and the taʿziyeh-khani tradition—the lesser-known areas of the repertoire beyond the treatment of Karbala.
The first paper examines the portrayal of Qabil, Adam's son Cain, focusing on a narrative element key to his crime, the ambiguous identity of his appointed wife —human, jinn or pari—drawing from al-Thaʿlabi's 'Ara'is al-Majalis fi Qisas al-Anbiya' and the taʿziyeh dramatization of Cain's story. The second presentation follows the pari–human marriage motif, arguing that in Persian legends, tales and popular stories the myth of forbidden union is gradually transformed into a meditation on ethical reciprocity and poetic inspiration, from sin to sanctity. The final paper considers a taʿziyeh rendition of The Annunciation contained within an unpublished manuscript rendition of Tavalod-e Isa (The Birth of Jesus) held by the Vatican Library. How does devotional drama present the miracle of Isa, without father, passing from the divine realm through Maryam, and into material existence? Together, these papers highlight how popular tradition, be it written or enacted, imagined embodied contact between the human and the supernatural, be it miraculous conception or marital union.
We propose the screening of a new documentary on the pardeh-dari (storytelling) tradition in conjunction with the panel, further information on request.

Cain's Appointed Wife: Human or Pari?

by Sara Khalili Jahromi / University of Fribourg-Switzerland / sara.khalilijahromi@unifr.ch

The story of Cain and Abel is told in the Quran, in Surat Al-Maʾidah (5:27-31). Cain kills his brother after God accepts Abel's offering and rejects his own. Later exegesis and commentaries expand this brief account by proposing an additional, more earthly motive for the first murder: a rivalry in love, a struggle over a woman. The earliest source of this story is the Testament of Adam, an early Christian work drawing on older Jewish and Sethian sources, which influenced early Islamic works. According to these sources, Cain becomes angry with Abel, because Eqlima (or Qelima), the beautiful sister, is designated to Abel. This story appears in Arabic and Persian books of Qisas al-Anbiya', where, in certain texts such as al-Thaʿlabi's 'Ara'is al-Majalis fi Qisas al-Anbiya', the author takes greater liberty to exempt the first family from incest by presenting Cain's designated wife as a jinn. Following the tradition in Persian literature of rendering jinn as pari, some folkloric texts, such as taʿziyeh

renditions of this story, depict Cain's appointed wife as a pari. This paper highlights the association of Cain with Satan in Judeo-Christian apocryphal texts, explores the pre-Islamic and Islamic background of the jinn, and examines the Avestan diabolic nature of pari to demonstrate how, in Persian folklore, this notorious mythological figure becomes connected to the Devil through his appointed wife. This paper investigates the theme of union with the supernatural as witnessed in Qisas al-Anbiya' and popular devotional drama.

An Entrance from the Divine: Tavalod-e Isa (The Birth of Jesus) a Shiʿi Devotional Drama

by E. Lucy Deacon / https://orcid.org/0009-0000-2796-5126 / lucy.deacon@unifr.ch

Divine intervention in the material world, the co-existence of the worlds of the seen and the unseen, and beings and souls crossing between them are central preoccupations of many religions - the impulse to explain the unseen forces that act upon our world and intervene in human history. Within popular Shiʿi narratives angels and houris travel to the material realm to carry out earthy tasks, aiding the faithful. When such narratives go beyond the written word, and the voices of storytellers, to be performed as drama, performers must present both supernatural and holy figures: with this comes the challenge of representing the divine and making miracles palpable.

Taʿziyeh-khani is an Iranian form of devotional drama best known for the plays performed during Muharram to commemorate the martyrdoms of Imam Husain and his supporters at Karbala, but the wider taʿziyeh repertoire treats diverse topics, from Creation to Resurrection. Providing more than an opportunity for ritual mourning, the performances offer a fleeting experience of proximity to the divine. Taʿziyeh is not a formal element of liturgy - indeed, where liturgy uses symbolic, metonymic, and sacramental means to invoke the holy, the dramatic performances bring the story into the present, acting out a narrative in full detail.

This paper considers a taʿziyeh treatment of The Annunciation within a manuscript rendition of Tavalod-e Isa (The Birth of Jesus) held by the Vatican Library. It examines the taʿziyeh dramatists' presentation for a popular audience of how, without father, Isa passed from the realm of the divine through Maryam, and into material existence. It engages with recent scholarship regarding the intersection of belief and the material, and the call to look beyond Karbala-related ritual for the full richness of Shiʿi culture (Marei, Shanneik and Funke eds. 2024), and is informed by studies of Mary/Maryam more broadly (Rubin 2009; Siddiqui 2013; George-Tvrtkovic 2018).

From Fairy Tale to Legend: The Pari–Human Marriage Motif in Persian Fairy Tales

by Davood Khazaie / DAVOOD KHAZAIE (PhD, Osnabrück University) is a scholar of comparative literature / dkhazaie@hotmail.com

This article examines the evolution of the Pari–human marriage motif in Persian narrative tradition, tracing its transformation from a myth of transgression to a philosophy of ethical and aesthetic coexistence. The Pari (پری)—a radiant being of air and fire, poised between angel and demon—embodies the encounter between human and transcendent. Through an analysis of major folkloric and literary examples—D. L. R. and E. O. Lorimer's Persian Tales (1919), the Bakhtiari fairy tale "The Daughter of the King of the Pari and Malek Mohammad" (Ghahremani 2021), "Yusof Shah of the Pari and Malek Ahmad", and the nineteenth-century Legend of Fāyez Dashtestānī in which he marries a Pari—the study demonstrates how Persian storytelling gradually redefines the supernatural union from sin to sanctity, from moral prohibition to creative revelation.

Employing the ethical philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, Gayatri Spivak's theory of subaltern voice, and Julia Kristeva's aesthetics of abjection, the article argues that the Pari's silence functions as an ethical command, her disappearance as self-authorship, and her symbolic return as poetic inspiration. Across centuries, the Pari–human marriage shifts from divine interdiction to human reciprocity, culminating in the figure of the poet whose art preserves the lost voice of the Pari.

Persian folklore thus turns the myth of forbidden love into an enduring meditation on humility, knowledge, and the sacred distance that sustains beauty.

Keywords:
Pari; Persian folklore; supernatural marriage; Bakhtiari Tales; Lorimer; Levinas; Spivak; Kristeva; ethics of unknowing; gender and myth; Fāyez Dashtestānī; Persian narrative tradition.

Room 1.18

129. Itinerant Voices: Musico-Poetic Performance On the Borders of Iran

Chair: Marie Huber

Scholarship on musico-poetic traditions in Iran has tended to focus on urban, elite forms, leaving regional and minoritarian practices underexplored. The panel addresses this gap by examining how regional musico-poetic performances in Iran transmit and reshape cultural memory, articulate community identity, and create mobile networks that reach across borders. Drawing on Richard Wolf's conception of the "local" as a time-bound moment shared between performer and audience, the panel contrasts embodied practices with standardised national canons that privilege universal, atemporal structures. Research questions include: How do regional performances sustain cultural memory? How do minoritarian and non-elite musical practices challenge nation-state narratives? How does the temporal, embodied nature of performance shape performer–audience relations? Case studies span Baluch minstrel traditions, the adoption of the Afghan rubāb in Torbat-e Jām, musical practices in Kurdistan, and Mojaddedi Naqshbandi conceptions of ritual time in Khorāsān. By bringing these studies and approaches into conversation, the panel repositions musico-poetic performance as a site of artistic continuity and resilience across modern borders. It also engages ongoing debates about politics, identity, and the circulation of cultural forms in Iranian and Persianate studies.

Sounding Time: Musico-Poetic Devotion among the Mojaddedi Naqshbandis of Torbat-e Jām

by Marie Huber / Independent Scholar / mariehuber@fastmail.com

Through their use of music and poetry in devotional practice, the Mojaddedi Naqshbandis around Torbat-e Jām are an exception within a Sufi order often associated with strict adherence to samā' prohibitions. A rural, non-elite, minoritarian community situated on the margins of Iran's cultural geography, the Naqshbandis invoke both local continuities and transregional imaginaries of premodern Khorāsān. By close analysis of poems sung during dhikr rituals, this paper argues that two interwoven conceptions of time underlie their practice. The first is a chronology of fictional genealogies that reach back to Timurid Herat, embedding the Naqshbandis of Torbat-e Jām in a lineage of spiritual and artistic authority. The second is the "existential reality of a continuous present" (Regula Burckhardt Qureshi) produced through rhythmic repetition and shared sound perception in devotional performance. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Torbat-e Jām, this paper integrates scholarship on Persianate Sufism (Papas, During) and music-making communities across Asia (Qureshi, Wolf) to situate the Naqshbandis of Torbat-e Jām within wider networks of minoritarian musico-poetic practice in the Turco-Persianate sphere. It proposes that attention to their acoustic and poetic engagements with time not only reframes Naqshbandi attitudes towards sound but also opens a window onto how Sufi communities negotiate presence, memory, and authority through collective acts of listening.

Afghan Rubab in the Herat–Khorasan Frontier

by Miguel Angel Gasco Rodriguez / University of Salamanca, Spain / michel.gasco@usal.es

In Torbat-e Jām in Iran's Khorasan, as well as in border towns such as Taybad, local performers are incorporating the Afghan rubāb to interpret their traditional pieces while expanding their repertoires with songs from Afghanistan. They do not confine themselves to the Herati repertoire, with many

pieces shared on both sides of the border, but also include items from the urban popular canon, such as songs by Ahmad Zahir. For many performers and audiences in these districts, Herat is not a distant "other," but part of an everyday social and historical horizon; this proximity shapes taste, repertoire, and ideas of what counts as "ours." This paper addresses not only how the rubāb is learned and adapted to local musical practice, but also the role of the border and the movement of Afghan musicians into Iran as well as their influence on music practices. It asks three questions: how is the rubāb locally learned and heard in Khorasan settings, which musical choices and techniques travel across the border and why, and how do performers and audiences negotiate ownership and taste as repertoire circulates. The approach combines ethnographic methods with musical analysis of performances and recordings, based on extensive fieldwork in Khorasan and among Afghan musicians in Mashhad that includes interviews, rehearsal observations, and documentation of live and studio sessions. The paper argues that music here functions as a form of everyday transnationalism in the sense of an informal infrastructure that enables circulation of instruments, techniques, and songs. This results in musical performance becoming a site of continuity and resilience that subtly reconfigures the border through sound.

Sounds of a thousand hills: Making music in and around Sanandaj

by Gay Jennifer Breyley / University of Adelaide/Monash University / gay.breyley@monash.edu

Iran's diverse Kurdish communities share a rich set of musical, literary, spiritual and ideological traditions, along with a capacity to adapt these to shifting conditions. Various forms of music identified as Kurdish are practised around the country, with those of Sanandaj (Sine), the capital of Iran's province of Kurdistan, receiving particular recognition through the 2019 UNESCO designation of Sanandaj as a 'Creative City of Music'. While this recognition has been productive, musical practices are very diverse in and around Sanandaj, with the less prominent forms often overlooked. Focusing on some of those less prominent musical forms, this paper examines the motivations and possibilities for music-making in the Sanandaj area, as well as some of the effects of musical performances and activities on broader communities and audiences. The paper argues that, for both 'traditional' practitioners and more experimental artists, music-making and oral storytelling serve as particularly effective conduits of collective memory and post-memory, of personal and communal emotion and of advocacy across a range of causes. These causes range from working people's rights to recognition and promotion of Kurdish identity, language and cultural history. The paper draws on extensive ethnographic research, including interviews with performing artists and other members of Iran's Kurdish communities, especially in and around Sanandaj.

Preserving Memory in Motion: The Status of Balochi Pahlawāns in Contemporary Iran

by Maryam Nourzaei / Name: Dr. Maryam NourzaeiCurrent Position: Postdoctoral Researcher, CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique), FranceEmail: maryam.nourzaei@cnrs.fr / maryam.nourzaei@lingfil.uu.se

The oral traditions of the Baloch people are in rapid decline, threatening one of Iran's most distinctive forms of intangible cultural heritage. Among these, the tradition of Balochi minstrels known as pahlawāns—once central to the transmission of poetry, music, and collective memory—has become critically endangered.

This study addresses the research question: How is the pahlawān tradition maintained, transformed, and threatened across different Balochi communities in contemporary Iran? Ethnographic research was conducted between 2020 and 2025 Sistan and Baluchistan Province. Data were gathered through direct observation, in-depth interviews with pahlawāns, their musical ensembles, and poets, as well as documentation of performances.

Findings reveal that the minstrel tradition varies considerably among Balochi communities, reflecting local histories, religious influences, and social contexts. Yet, technological change, evolving religious attitudes, and declining professional expertise have severely weakened its transmission. The presentation will discuss how the erosion of intergenerational continuity threatens both the survival of the pahlawān tradition and the broader resilience and identity of Baloch cultural heritage.

10:30 – 10:45

Coffee Break

11:00 – 12:30

Annual General Meeting

Leeuwenbergh

Servaasbolwerk 1a, Utrecht

List of Participants AIS Utrecht 2026

Abasi, Ali R.
Abdi, Bahar
Abdul Razak, Rowena
Abdulrahman, Kareem
Abedini, Hesam
Abedini, Vahid
Abedinifard, Mostafa
Aberi Zahed, Sahra
Abrahamian, Ervand
Afary, Janet
Aghaie, Fateme
Ahari, Zahra
Ahmadi, Fatemeh
Akbari Shahmirzadi, Atefeh
Akbari, Nahal
Akbari, Reza H.
Akhavan, Niki
Akhbari, Rouzbeh
Akhmedjanova, Kamila
Akhtar, Nadeem
Alaghband, Leonardo
Alavi, Samad
Alemzadeh, Maryam
Alizadeh, Yass
Allen, Lindsay
Alvandi, Roham
Amini, Simin
Amir, Daniel
Amryan, Tereza
Andreeva, Elena
Arcak Casale, Sinem
Ardekanian, Amirali
Arnoux, Quentin
Arushanyan, Arpine
Arzoumanov, Jean
Ashraf, Assef
Asinovskiy, Dmitry
Askari, Nasrin
Atabaki, Touraj
Atamaz, Serpil
Avchyan, Hakob
Avvali, Arash M.
Aydemir, Mert
Azad, Arezou
Azadibougar, Omid
Azhar, Zahra
Azimi, Amin
Aziz, Sarah
Azizi, Arash
Bahl, Christopher
Bakhtiari, Hanieh
Banisafar, Negar
Balslev, Sivan
Baltacioglu-Brammer, Ayse
Barzegar, Ebrahim
Bathaee, Yasaman
Batmanghelichi, Kristin
Soraya
Bauer, Janet
Bayat, Asef
Bazyar, Marziyeh
Beard, Michael
Beaud, Guillaume
Bedrede, Thomas
Behbehani, Shekoufeh
Behtoui, Alirez
Beigpour, Kourosh
Ben Zur, Yarden Yosef
Benfey, Thomas
Benson, Jake
Berger, Simon
Besozzi, Sheida
Biglari, Mattin
Birjandifar, Nazak
Blackthorne-O'Barr, Erik
Blajet, Zuzanna
Bochenska, Joanna
Bockholt, Philip
Bohdan, Siarhei
Boka, Shima
Borhan, Behzad
Boylston, Nicholas
Brack, Jonathan
Breyley, Gay
Brookshaw, Dominic Parviz
Bruno, Jacopo
Camacho Padilla, Fernando
Capps, Kyle
Carmi, Omer
Cereti, Carlo Giovanni
Chagnon, Michael
Chehabi, Houchang
Cheves, Belle
Chiru, Adela Nicoleta
Chu, Dayeon
Clement, Michelle
Cole, Juan
Colliva, Luca
Cronin, Stephanie
Cross, Cameron
Daemi, Faezeh
Daneshvar, Shahab
Darbinian, Noonik
Daryaee, Touraj
Davari, Arash
Davidson, M. Olga
Davoudi, Jamileh
De Groot, Joanna
Deacon, Lucy
Delshad, Parisa
Delvarani, Aryasp
DePierro, Melissa
DeSouza, Wendy
Desval Fehrani, Ankur
Ding, Iskandar
Dixon, Martin
Dorleijn, Margreet
Dreyer, Carina
Durand-Guédy, David
Duvigneau, Julie
Ebrahimi, Jaleh
Eghbalizarch,
Mohammadreza
Ehsani, Kaveh
Ekiz, Ahmet Baris
Elling, Rasmus Christian
Emrani, Haleh
Errichiello, Mariano
Eslami, Elaheh
Esmaeilpour, Naghmeh
Fakhraeirad, Armaghan
Farazmand, Parang
Farghadani, Shahla
Farhadytooli, Morteza
Faroughi, Fatemeh

Farra, Ammar
Farrokhfar, Farzaneh
Farzaneh, Mateo
Mohammad
Fayyaz, Fatima
Fazli, Mozhgan
Fernando, Indran
Figueroa, William
Fozi, Navid
Fozoon, Babak
Fuchs, Simon Wolfgang
Gabbay, Alyssa
Ghaderi, Farangis
Ghaffari, Mahbod
Ghajarjazi, Arash
Ghandehari, Alborz
Ghardashkhani, Goulia
Gheissari, Ali
Ghodratzadeh, Amin
Gholami, Rahim
Ghomashlouyan, Moslem
Ghorbankarimi, Maryam
Ghuloom, Rana
Giunashvili, Helen
Gledhill, Kevin
Golgiri, Rahil
Golshan, Mohammad
Goswami, Shubham
Gradoni, Mark
Gray, Jan-Willem
Gurel, Perin
Gustafson, James
Habibi, Negar
Haghighi, Mehran
Hajiagha, Azad Rahim
Hajyasini, Haleh
Halft, Dennis
Hameed, Hasan
Hannun, Marya
Hart, Fuchsia
Hartley, Julia
Hashemipour, Ashkan
Hassani, Hannah
Hayes, Ed
Headrick, Isabelle
Hegland, Mary Elaine
Heller, Anna
Heller, Anna Dorothee
Herzig, Edmund
Heshmati, Ata
Heydarkhani, Maryam
Hodgkin, Samuel
Hoffmann, Alexandra
Holtzapffel, Maarten
Homayoonzad, Niloofar
Hoodfar, Homa
Hooman, Niloofar
Hormozinejad, Sara
Hosseini Ghaffari, Fatemeh
Hosseini, Parvaneh
Hosseini, Sajedeh
Hosseini, Seyed Abdolreza
Hosseinioun, Delaram
Hu, Yuchen
Huber, Marie
Hubert, Thibaut D.
Hunsberger, Alice
Hussein Gul, Zakir
Insom, Camilla
Irani-Tehrani, Amir
Izadi, Ahmad
Izadpanah, Amir
Izzo, Gianni
Jabbari, Alexander
Jafari, Peyman
Jahanbani, Neda
Jahanshahi, Pouya
Jaladat, Nadere
Javadpour, Misagh
Jones, Tobias
Kalb, Zep
Kamali Sarvestani, Mehrak
Kameli, Marziyeh
Kamola, Stefan
Kana'an, Ruba
Karakurt, Hevin
Karimi, Nilufar
Kashani-Sabet, Firoozeh
Kashfi, Ehsan
Kaveh, Yalda
Kavianifar, Farinaz
Kayir Ucsu, Gul Banu
Kazemi, Ranin
Kazemipourleilabadi, Negar
Keivan, Shafigheh
Kermani, Hossein
Keshavarzian, Hoornaz
Khademi, Manizheh
Khakzad, Delbar
Khalili Jahromi, Sara
Khayambashi, Shirin
Khazaie, Davood
Khetia, Vinay
Khezri, Haidar
Khorasani, Mahboubeh
Kia, Mana
Kian, Azadeh
Kim, Gunha
Kinra, Rajeev
Kiong Teh, Guan
Kjaran, Jon
Kłagisz, Mateusz
Koh, Taejin
Kolly, Maryam
Koo, Gi Yeon
Koochakzadeh, Leila
Kotler, Ayelet
Kovacs, Hajnalka
Kowalska, Renata Rusek
Koyagi, Mikiya
Krasnowolska, Anna
Kurin, Gennady
Kvindesland, Eirik
Kwak, Saera
Langer, Axel
Langroudi, Ali B.
Lashini, Pouran
Lashkari, Maryam
Lawrence, Tanya
Learn, Anna
Lee, John W.I.
Leezenberg, Michiel
Leong, Amanda
Lewental, D Gershon
Lingwood, Chad
Litvak, Meir
Lob, Eric
Longhi, Giacomo
Losensky, Paul E.
Lynch, Matthew
Mahdavi, Mojtaba
Maleki, Kimia
Marandi Lopez, Leila
Marashi, Afshin

Maresca, Giulio
Martínez Porro, Jaime
Masjedi, Fatemeh
Masoudi Nejad, Reza
Matin-Asgari, Afshin
Matsunaga, Yasuyuki
Matthee, Rudi
Mazdeh, Vahid
Mazhjoo, Nina
Mazrouei, Shiva
Mazzocchi, Dario
Michel, Salomé
Mihan, Shiva
Milani, Mohsen
Milanloo, Hadi
Mincheva, Dilyana
Mirahmadi, Sara
Mirshahvalad, Minoo
Mirzaee Jadideslami, Mohammadali
Mitchell, Colin
Moazzen, Maryam
Moghadam, Amin
Moghaddam, Melika
Mohagheghi, Arash
Mohammadi Shirmahaleh, Shekoufeh
Mohammadi, Hamideh
Mokhtarian, Jason
Molaie, Sara
Momeni, Azadeh
Momeni, Bahar
Monastyrskaya, Darya
Montazeri, Fateme
Moosavi, Amir
Moosavi, Mahroo
Moossavi, Boshra
Morris, Natasha
Moruzzi, Norma
Moshiri, Abolfazl
Moslehi, Amirmahdi
Moslemi Mehnni, Leila
Motadel, David
Motlagh, Amy
Mottahedeh, Negar
Mousavi, Bita
Mousavi, Razieh S.
Movahedi-Lankarani, Ciruce
Mozafari, Parmis
Musawi Natanzi, Paniz
Nabavi, Negin
Naghibi, Nima
Naghshvarian, Fatemeh
Nagy, Gregory
Nair, Arjun
Najafi, Mahnam
Namazi, Behzad
Nanquette, Laetitia
Nas, Ilgin
Nedaeifar, Hoda
Nehzati, Sarah
Niechciał, Paulina
Nienhaus–Naghashian, Bita
Nieweg, Alexandra
Niroumand, Ali
Nojoumian, Peyman
Noori, Hasan
Noorian, Zhinia
Nooshin, Laudan
Nourzaei, Maryam
O'Malley, Austin
Oghalai, Bahar
Omidi, Reza
Orandi, Farahnaz
Orthmann, Eva
Ozdemir, Mehtap
Pagliani, Fabio
Paivandi, Saeed
Pak, Nacim
Palizban, Maryam
Papoliyazdi, Ali
Pello, Stefano
Pfeifer, Annie
Pirasteh, Elyas
Pishbin, Shaahin
Pistor-Hatam, Anja
Poor, Daryoush
Pourzand, Azadeh
Quinn, Sholeh
Qurboniev, Aslisho
Qureshi, Ilma
Rahbari, Ladan
Rahimi Bahmany, Leila
Rahimi, Babak
Rahimi, Masoumeh
Rahimi, Mohammadreza
Rahimieh, Nasrin
Rahmani Ghanavizbaf, Ali
Rahmani Ghanavizbaf, Nima
Raissadat, Sepideh
Rakowiecka-Asgari, Karolina
Randjbar-Daemi, Siavush
Rasekhian, Sepideh
Rashid Salim, Ahmad
Rekabtalaei, Golbarg
Rezaee, Maryam
Rezakhani, Khodadad
Rezania, Mehdi
Rhoné-Quer, Camille
Rodriguez, Miguel Angel Gasco
Rokni, Siavash
Römer, Benedikt
Roukoz, Riwa
Rzepka, Marcin
Saadi-Nejad, Manya
Sabeti, Somita
Saçmalı, Habib
Sadan, Amit
Sadeghi, Zeynab
Sadeghian, Saghar
Sadjed, Ariane
Saeidi, Ali
Safaeipour, Hadi
Saffari, Siavash
Sahranavard, Neda
Salim, Ahmad Rashid
Salmasi, Aysa
Samini, Naghmeh
Scharbrodt, Oliver
Schmeding, Annika
Sedighi, Anousha
Seidel, Roman
Şengül, Serdar
Sengupta, Anwesha
Seven, Nezih
Seyed-Gohrab, Asghar
Shabani, Azadeh
Shabani-Jadidi, Pouneh
Shablovskaia, Alisa
Shafiezadeh Garousi, Sara
Shah, Zahra
Shahidi, Iqan
Shahzadi, Ramin

Shajiei, Shadi
Shakerifard, Solmaz
Sham Roshan, Mehdi
Shams, Fatemeh
Shannon, Kelly
Shannon, Matthew
Sharifi Oroumi, Neda
Sharifi, Meraj
Shawki-Aziz Gómez, Yashmina María
Sheffield, Daniel
Sheibani, Khatereh
Shekhawat, Ojaswini
Shortle, Margaret
Siamdoust, Nahid
Sidiqi, Mursal
Siebertz, Roman
Simidchieva, Marta
Sirgy, Dominique
Sohrabi, Nader
Soltanimoghadam, Saeede
Sonboldel, Farshad
Steele, Robert
Sternfeld, Lior
Sturkenboom, Ilse
Subtelny, Maria
Swellander, Michael
Szabo, Eszter Mlitta
Szanto, Edith
Szitar, Kristof
Tabandeh, Reza
Tabatabaei, Sadaf
Tadrisi, Shima
Taha, Amir
Tahir Nur, Ahmed
Talajooy, Saeed
Talattof, Kamran
Talebi, Nader
Taleghani, Azita
Tamimi Arab, Pooyan
Tavakol, Mahdieh
Tavakoli, Mohamad
Tavakoli-Targhi, Mohamad
Tavanaei Marvi, Fatemeh
Terribili, Gianfilippo
Tiburcio, Alberto
Tonoyan, Artyom
Touraj, Mahdi
Tousi, Khosrow
Tribuzio, Laura
Tzfadya, Ezra
Vahabzadeh, Peyman
Vali Zadeh, Mahdieh
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Yekta, Nilou
Yin, Ruinong
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Zaidi, Abid
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Zarantonello, Marianna
Zarei, Rouhollah
Zenhari, Roxana
Zerehdaran, Farzad
Zhaf, Mahrou
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Zischkin, Theresa