

# The Idea of Iran: The Turko-Timurid Intermezzo



**Saturday 18 – Sunday 19 November 2017**  
**Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre**  
**SOAS University of London**

## The Idea of Iran: The Turko–Timurid Intermezzo

The thirteenth programme in *The Idea of Iran* annual series. The Centre for Iranian Studies, the Department of History, Religions and Philosophies, SOAS and the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge remain deeply grateful to the Soudavar Memorial Foundation for their continued support for this series.

### Saturday 18 November

9.15-9.45                    **Registration**

9.45-10.00                **Welcome**

10.00-10.45              ***The Local and the Universal in Turco-Iranian Ideology***  
*Beatrice Manz, Professor of History, Tufts University*

We should not see the idea of Iran as a unitary conception, or a consistent one. Iranian traditions served in a variety of ways. Iran mattered less as a specific realm to be ruled than as a historical or cultural presence. Ideas of Iranian kingship and the prestige of Persian culture were used to enhance the stature of Turco-Mongolian dynasties, both regional and imperial. Turco-Mongolian and Iranian traditions were also used for claims to local power, and rulers invoked the Ilkhans as well as Chinggis Khan. Iranian regional dynasties often recognized Turco-Mongolian suzerainty while tracing their descent back to the Sasanians and numerous cities memorialized their founding in the Sasanian period. The *Shahnama* remained important at both the imperial and the regional level. The Turco-Mongolian dynasties produced numerous royal manuscripts of it and on the most local level, we still find places actively associated with the myths of the *Shahnama*.

10.45-11.30              ***The Exaltation of Iran by the Others: the Turks as promoters of the Idea of Iran***  
*Michele Bernardini, Professor of Persian Language and Literature and the History of Iran and Ottoman empires at the University of Naples "L'Orientale"*

This paper is centred on the Ghaznavid, Saljuq and Timurid periods (10<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries). Adopting the concept of *Gechichtsbewußtsein* (historical awareness), introduced by Bert Fragner in his "Persophonie", it will analyse various literary sources and chronicles focusing on the adoption of the "Iranian model" by the Turkish elites and in particular the use of the Persian language as an instrument for the building of a solid tradition of self-representation. Among the various sources taken into consideration, the paper will analyse the works of Firdausi, Mas'ud-i Sa'd-i Salman, Nizam al-Mulk, and Jami, along with the historical chronicles. Moreover, the Turkish patronage of these works will be the object of a specific analysis. A final part of the paper will be devoted to Western historiography and the birth of the idea of Iran in the last century in the works of Bartol'd, Minorsky, Frye, Aubin, Gnoli and other more recent scholars.

11.30-12.00              **Coffee**

12-12.45

***Defining the Look of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century in Iran: The Arts of the Book***

*Eleanor Sims, Independent Scholar*

My presentation focuses on one of the premier material creations of the 15<sup>th</sup> century in Iran. I shall discuss ten manuscripts: different texts, different purposes, every one of superb quality. All were made in the lands ruled by Timurid princes and their Turkmen rivals between 798/1396 and 892/1488; most were actually made at the order of these ruling bibliophiles. I shall comment on many features: their patrons; their size and paper and calligraphy; their ornament, and (where they survive) their bindings; last but not least - though perhaps most identifiably - their illustrations. My aim is to articulate, and thus to define, the characteristics that distinguish so many Iranian manuscripts of this century as among the supreme manifestations of the arts of the book, anywhere and at any time. These ten are only a selection from among so many others that might equally have been mentioned; and all exemplify a significant aspect of “the idea of Iran”.

12.45-1.30

***Samarqand's Splendour: Innovations in Timurid Architecture under Timur and Ulugh Beg***

*Elena Paskaleva, Assistant Professor (UD) in Heritage Studies, Leiden University*

After the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Timurid architecture became intrinsic to the skyline of Samarqand. Were the majority of craftsmen really ‘Iranian’ or were they local to Samarqand using a *nisba* related to Isfahan, Shiraz or Tabriz? While the chronicles mention Timur’s capture of builders and craftsmen during his campaigns, the actual designs and techniques may have been local, as suggested by the early mausoleums at Shah-i Zinda and the Gur-i Amir. I will further analyse the building activities of Ulugh Beg (r. 1409-1449). The impact of cultural exchanges with Ming China that flourished throughout his reign will be evaluated from examples from the Gur-i Amir and the Chinese pavilion built in the Bagh-i Maidan. The Gur-i Amir combined both Persian and Chinese artistic influences that resulted in the development of new decoration patterns and the creation of new tile revetments unique to Samarqand. I will propose the revision of several plans and construction dates.

1.30-2.30

**Lunch**

2.30-3.15

***The Reception of Hafiz in the Works of Jami and Nava’i***

*Marc Toutant, Researcher at the CNRS (French National Centre for Scientific Research)*

In his *Baharistan*, Jami gives the highest marks to the poetry of Hāfiz, saying that “at times it approached the inimitability [of the Koran].” Jami even uses the term *i’jaz* to characterize it, which was employed with reference to the miraculous nature of the Koran which made it impossible to imitate. Nevertheless, during the Last Timurid period, an era that is traditionally regarded as a highpoint in the composition of imitational poetry, Hafiz was imitated more than ever. He was one of Jami’s models when he composed his own *divan*. Similarly, another major Herati author, Nava’i (1441-1501), said he wrote both his Persian and Turkish *divans* in imitation of Hafiz. What did Hafiz really represent for this generation of poets? What do contemporary Persian and Chaghatay Turkish sources of information about Timurid poets (such as Nava’i’s *Majalis al-nafa’is*) tell us about the reception and legacy of Hafiz in this era?

3.15-4.00

***Idealizing Iran: Visions of Bureaucrats, Historians and Poets***  
*Shahzad Bashir, Aga Khan Professor of Islamic Humanities, Brown University*

In the Timurid-Turkoman period, bureaucrats and literati who utilized Persian as their chief means of expression formed a network spread throughout Iran, Central Asia, and India. The vast amount of literature generated by them includes collections of letters as well as formal works such as chronicles, *adab* treatises, and poetry in various genres. I focus on the work of prolific authors such as 'Abd al-Karim Nimdihi (d. ca. 1505), Fazlallah Khunji-Isfahani (d. 1519), and Ghiyas al-Din Khwandamir (d. 1535) to highlight this group's investment in an Iran of the past that formed the basis of a common identity. Imbued with nostalgia, the period's poetry is an especially important element for highlighting this point. In the long run, the idealized Iran we find in this material was a crucial cultural and political reference point for the empires and states that followed in later centuries.

4.00-4.30

**Tea**

4.30-5.15

***A Man of Letters: Husain Va'iz Kashifi and his Persian Project***  
*Maria Subtelny, Professor of Persian and Islamic Studies, Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations, University of Toronto*

The culture wars in greater Iran during the Timurid period were fought on a number of fronts —political, religious, and linguistic. Long used for historical writing, diplomacy, and poetry, the Persian language held its own, but some literary-minded individuals believed it needed a boost in order to address the needs of the Persian public. Enter the preacher, Sufi, and polymath, Husain b. 'Ali, known as "Kashifi" (d. 910/1504–5). Patronized by the Timurid ruler Sultan-Husain (r. 1469–1506) and members of his household, Kashifi embarked on a "Persian project" in which he synthesized, systematized, plagiarized, and translated a representative range of religious, literary, and esoteric works in order to make them available to a Persian readership. Thanks to his literary flair and elegant prose style, he managed to transform and even surpass the originals he drew on. The paper will trace the trajectory of Kashifi's literary career and focus on those works that made a lasting imprint on the culture of the late Timurid period and beyond.

## **Sunday 19 November**

10.30-11.15

***From Maragha to Samarqand and Beyond: Revisiting a Quartet of Scientific Traditions in 'Greater Persia' (ca. 1300-1500s)***  
*Elaheh Kheirandish, Department of History of Art and Architecture, Harvard University*

As a sequel to an earlier presentation at SOAS (on the tenth anniversary of the Soudavar Memorial Foundation in 2011), the present paper extends the discussion of "A quartet of scientific traditions: geometry, astronomy, mechanics and optics (ca. 1000)", from the early to the late Middle Ages (ca. 1300-1500s), where the 'Persian' context is focused on geographical locations and sites of transmission in 'Persian' lands more than linguistic expressions and ethnic associations of 'Persian' texts or authors. 'From Maragha to Samarqand and Beyond' refers to geographical sites represented in successive 'period' pieces: prefaces, letters, postscripts, excerpts and other genres variously capturing contemporary 'Ideas of Iran'. Revisiting the four scientific traditions under discussion in different times and places reveals unexpected developments within a 'Greater Persia' in both the geographical and intellectual senses of that expression, thereby inverting images long held of their underexposed 'dark chambers'.

11.15-11.45      **Coffee**

11.45-12.30      ***An Idea of Iran on Mongol Foundations: Dynasties, Territory and Tabriz as Royal City in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century***  
*Daniel Zakrzewski, University of Marburg*

The paper traces the 15<sup>th</sup>-century stages of a process initiated under the Ilkhanid dynasty and eventually finalizing an idea of Iran as a territorially distinct Islamic kingdom, bearing that name, whose primary royal city was Tabriz. It will be argued that the Turkmen dynasties contributed most to this finalizing process, inserting themselves into a specific post-Ilkhanid sequence of dynastic succession mainly in two ways. First, the Qara Qoyunlu and then the Aq Qoyunlu managed to largely reproduce the Ilkhanid realm in terms of territory at the expense of the Timurids who had briefly ruled Tabriz. Moreover, the major Turkmen rulers literally continued to build on a foundation laid by the celebrated convert Ilkhan Ghazan in Tabriz erecting their own royal monuments in the city, most notably mosque-mausoleum complexes.

12.30-1.15      ***Two Later 9<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup>-Century Iranian Travel Narratives***  
*John E. Woods, Professor of Iranian and Central Asian History, University of Chicago*

This presentation focuses on two Persian travel accounts from the second half of the 9<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> century: the *Khunkar-nama* of Sayyid Mir 'Ali ibn Muzaffar Tusi, "Mu'ali" and the *Chartakht* of Amir Sayyid Kamal al-Din Husayn Abivardi, "Fayzi". These two differ sharply in a number of ways from the earlier writings of Ghiyas al-Din Naqqash and 'Abd al-Razzaq Samarqandi: both are rather long *masnavis*, not prose narratives; both describe travels within the Dar al-Islam - not adjacent "foreign" regions - and the Pilgrimage to the Holy Cities of the Hijaz was the motivating force behind each; and both appear to exist in unique manuscript copies and therefore probably did not circulate widely. Mu'ali's work is largely a panegyric addressed to the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II, but it also contains important details on later Timurid and Turkman history. Fayzi's poem is much more a travelogue in which the author visits the four great Islamic political centers of his age: Constantinople, Cairo, Tabriz, and Herat.

1.15-1.30      **Closing Remarks**

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A Symposium

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**Organised by:**

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