

# The Idea of Iran: The Second Safavid Century



**Saturday 11 & Sunday 12 May 2019**  
**Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre**  
**SOAS University of London**

## The Idea of Iran: The Second Safavid Century

The fifteenth programme in *The Idea of Iran* annual series and the second dedicated to the Safavid era. What does the Idea of Iran mean at this period? Can we discern the ways that contemporaries viewed their traditions and their environment (natural or built); what was the view of outsiders, and how does modern scholarship define the distinctive aspects of the period?

### Saturday 11 May

9.30-9.50      **Registration**

9.50-10.00    **Introduction**

10.00-10.40    ***How was Shi'ism 'Persianized' by the Use of Persian Language in Scholastic Literature, and how were the Ulema Successful in Popularizing it in Urban Society?***  
*Rosemary Stanfield-Johnson, University of Minnesota Duluth*

On a popular level the process of imparting Twelver Shi'ism to Iranian society beginning in 1501 meant relinquishing older literary traditions for Twelver Shi'i ones. A number of folktales in which pre-Islamic Iranian mythical heroes encounter Shi'i champions can be seen as part of this process. While this uniting of influences had a measurable societal impact, the greater process of defining a Shi'i identity was far from complete, as the merits of a mingling of Twelver Shi'ism and popular culture were not sufficient to inculcate the Persian-speaking population with the tenets of Twelver Shi'ism. What was needed was a programme to provide Twelver Shi'i doctrinal texts to Persian speakers. This was one of the aims of Muhammad Baqer Majlesi (d. 1699), some of whose works in Persian essentially catechized Twelver Shi'i doctrine for an Iranian audience. This paper investigates Majlesi's Persian language programme through a discussion of relevant works and their application to society in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century.

**Rosemary Stanfield-Johnson** is Associate Professor of Religious History at the University of Minnesota Duluth. Dr. Stanfield-Johnson's research emphasis is pre-modern Iranian history, Shi'i political and popular culture, and popular sectarian literature of the classical Safavid period (1500-1590). She has spent a semester in the School of Historical Studies at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton and was a Senior Fulbright research scholar in Hyderabad, India, and has published in *Iranian Studies* and in *Der Islam*. Recently she has begun work on the interaction of sufism and yoga in west and south Asia with an emphasis on perceptions of the body.

10.40-11.20    ***Persian Literature as Ottoman Authors Saw it in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century***  
*Benedek Péri, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest*

Classical Ottoman literature is a derived literature which means that Ottoman authors very consciously followed the models of a foreign literary tradition they recognized as superior. Though the first classical Turkish literary texts appeared in Anatolia in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, the next two centuries can be best described as a period of experimenting with how elements of the Persian literary tradition could be best adapted to a different linguistic environment. The second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, however, witnessed profound changes. Thanks to Navayi's texts, Ottoman authors discovered how to produce high-quality literature in Turkish that complied with all the requirements set before authors in a classical Persianate literary system. Using the data available in various literary texts produced by Ottoman authors and works on literary theory and poetry in Persian, the aim of this paper is to give an overall picture of how they perceived the Persian literary canon and who were the Persian authors they imitated.

**Benedek Péri** is the Director of the Institute of Oriental Studies and the Head of the Department of Turkic Studies at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. His research interests include the history of Persianate literary traditions (Chaghatay, Persian, Ottoman, Türki-yi 'Ajami) with a special focus on the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century and the history of drug consumption in Persianate societies. His latest book titled *Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences* was published in 2018. He is currently working on a critical edition of Yavuz Sultan Selim's (r. 1512-1520) Persian divan.

11.20-12.00    ***Iran in the Itineraries of Peripatetic Safavid Poets***  
*Sunil Sharma, Boston University*

The phenomenon of the large-scale emigration of Iranians from the Safavid lands to the Ottoman, Mughal, and Deccan courts has received a great deal of scholarly attention, with the focus being on how these emigres fared in and wrote about their new environments. The various modes of travel and networks of people they became part of in getting to their destinations, as well as how they felt about the land they left behind, are topics that have not received as much attention. Poets composed in various forms to describe the experience of emigration and wonders of new places using a range of emotions, while ruminating with an admixture of nostalgia and pride on their homeland. This paper looks at selected Safavid emigre poets and works in which poetic genre, language and geography are intertwined to inscribe the places on their

itineraries with special significance, even as they were redrawing the map of the Persianate world.

**Sunil Sharma** is Professor of Persianate and Comparative Literature at Boston University's Department of World Languages and Literatures. He received his PhD in Persian literature from the University of Chicago. His research interests are in the areas of Persian(ate) literary and visual cultures, translation and travel writing. His most recent book is *Mughal Arcadia: Persian Poetry in an Indian Court* (Harvard University Press, 2017). He serves on the editorial board of the *Journal of Persianate Societies* and *Studies in Persian Cultural History*. He is the current President of the Association for the Study of Persianate Societies (ASPS).

12.00-1.30            **Lunch**

1.30-2.10            ***"The world is an oyster and Iran, the pearl": Representations of Iran in Safavid Persian Travel Literature***  
*Maryam Ala Amjadi, Independent Scholar*

European travel accounts have often been incorporated into scholarship on Safavid Iran as sources for historiography and ethnographic information. The study of previously underexplored travel narratives composed by Safavid Iranians, although outnumbered by European accounts, foregrounds Persian travel writing as a self-referential and self-reflective source for Safavid and Shi'i historiography. The image of Iran in Safavid narratives of travels, none of which were destined for Europe, emerges in close encounters with Iran's neighbours in the Muslim world and beyond. Safavid travel narratives, as the site of self-inscription, reveal how Iranians envisaged Iran and their identity in the course of their travels within and outside Iran.

**Maryam Ala Amjadi** earned her Erasmus Mundus joint doctorate degree in July 2017 from University of Kent (UK) and Universidade do Porto (Portugal). Her research focuses on the complex relationship between mobility and identity in Persian Safavid travel narratives. She has previously worked as a writer for the *Tehran Times Daily*, where she founded and wrote a weekly page dedicated to Iranian culture and society. Ala Amjadi is a published poet and translator of poetry. Her book chapter on poetry in Iran's contemporary theo-political culture will appear in the *Routledge International Handbook of Religion in Global Society*.

2.10-2.50            ***The Idea of Iran as Reflected in the Writings of the French and European Travellers in the Safavid Era***  
*Aurélie Salesses-Chabrier, Independent Scholar*

This presentation shows how the French perceived Safavid Iran through the reception of travel and embassy narratives in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Iranian example highlights the changes in political society in the first state of modernity. The establishment of an authoritarian and concentrated government in the hands of Shah 'Abbas raised fundamental questions about the nature and reality of power. French readers were interested in the political struggles that crossed Safavid society. Travellers' descriptions support our reflection on the construction of a political society subject in both form and in functioning to the monarchical figure. European readers were also inspired to see how the Safavid dynasty managed to impose a religious unity in its territories. The oppositions encountered found an echo in 17<sup>th</sup>-century France crossed by confessional conflicts and the issue of Protestantism. Similarly, the "tolerance" practiced by Safavid rulers towards Christian and Hindu minorities questioned the regulatory role that the State must play in the religious sphere.

Doctor in modern history, **Aurélie Salesses-Chabrier**, is a specialist in political and cultural relations between Safavid Iran and Europe. She has taught Iranian history and civilization at the National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations (INALCO, Paris) and also at the Paris III-Sorbonne Nouvelle University. Her current research focuses on diplomatic, cultural and economic relations between France and Iran in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. She currently teaches history in the Lyon area.

2.50-3.30            ***The Nature of Commercial Relations between Safavid Persia and Western Europe***  
*Willem Floor, Independent Scholar*

Safavid Persia was a poor agricultural economy, which only had a few exportable products to offer that were of interest to Western Europeans. As a result, trade with Portugal, Great Britain and the Netherlands (in order of arrival and commercial importance) was limited in size and, to some extent, in composition. The nature of relations (intensity, variety, legal) and interaction with, as well as their view of, Safavid Persia differed significantly between these various trading partners, as a result of the different legal and organizational structure of the disparate trading organizations.

**Willem Floor** is a retired energy specialist from the World Bank and a long-time student of Persian social and economic history from the earliest times till today. He has written some 50 books and more than 200 articles. As to the Safavid period he has published some ten books (as well as many articles) on the functioning of its economy, its government, its fiscal and monetary system, the textile industry, co-edited a Safavid five-language Turkic-Persian dictionary, as well has co-translated travelogues from Latin (Pedros Bedik, Engelbert Kaempfer), Ottoman (Evliya Chelebi) and Persian (two Safavid administrative manuals).

3.30-4.00

**Tea Break**

4.00-4.40

***Flora in Safavid Painting and Drawing***  
*Sheila Canby, Metropolitan Museum of Art*

The illustrations to the majestic *Shahnama*, produced for Shah Tahmasp between c. 1524 and c. 1535, contain accurate depictions of well-known flowers, trees and shrubs. Study of these plants may shed light on what was actually growing in Iran during the early 16<sup>th</sup> century and thus what the Safavids saw in their environment. Yet, artists also relied on earlier prototypes for compositional details, so the identification of the plants in the *Shahnama* paintings may indicate only a familiarity with artistic renderings of certain plants, not the plants themselves. This paper will consider how plants in late 15<sup>th</sup>-century paintings relate to those in Tahmasp's *Shahnama*. Representations of plants in the 17<sup>th</sup> century reveal a decline in the careful portrayal of plants in manuscript illustrations and a different approach to flora from around 1640 onward, thanks to an increased awareness of European prints and printed books.

**Sheila Canby** is Curator Emerita in the Department of Islamic Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Canby was appointed Patti Cadby Birch Curator in Charge of the Islamic Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2009, after eighteen years as Curator of Islamic Art and Antiquities at the British Museum. Her publications include *Shah 'Abbas: The Remaking of Iran* (2009) *Islamic Art in Detail* (2005), *Hunt for Paradise: Court Arts of Safavid Iran, 1501-76*, with Jon Thompson (2003), *The Golden Age of Persian Art, 1501-1722* (1999), *Persian Painting* (1993), *The Shahnama of Shah Tahmasp* (2011 and 2014), and with Deniz Beyazit and Martina Rugiadi, *Court and Cosmos: The Great Age of the Seljuqs* (2016).

4.40-5.20

***Safavid Town-Planning in the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Centuries: from Farahabad (Mazandaran) to Farahabad (Isfahan)***  
*Sussan Babaie, The Courtauld Institute of Art*

The coordinated appearance in Safavid Iran of a number of major new town planning projects offers compelling evidence for the development of a highly sophisticated and premeditated urban design agenda. From Qazvin to Isfahan, Farahabad in Mazandaran to Farahabad in Isfahan, Kerman, Mashhad, Yazd and Kashan; all these cities had an older medieval core but were freshly redesigned alongside the spatial coordinates of social life. This paper argues that the design of Safavid urban centres and their constituent institutions – mosque, palace, madrasa, marketplace – serve in varying compositions as a blueprint of an urban 'thinking', a theory teased out of a discourse that is built in bricks and not written in words. This 'theory' of urban planning, it further emerges, points to a significant reiteration of an idea of kingship that is cognizant of the antiquities of Iran, deep-seated without being archaeological but specific to a Safavid ideological and socio-political armature.

**Sussan Babaie** is Reader in the Arts of Iran and Islam at The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London. She is the author of *Isfahan and its Palaces: Statecraft, Shi'ism and the Architecture of Conviviality in Early Modern Iran*, the co-editor/co-author of *Persian Kingship and Architecture* (I.B.Tauris, 2015) and *Slaves of The Shah* (I.B.Tauris, 2004), and the editor of *Iran After the Mongols*, vol. 8 in the *The Idea of Iran* series (2019).

5.20-6.00

***Not the last Word on the so-called 'Sanguszko' Group of Safavid Carpets***  
*Michael Franses, Independent Historian in Textile Art*

In 1904, at an exhibition in St. Petersburg, a magnificent Safavid-period Iranian carpet that then belonged to Prince Roman Sanguszko was exhibited for the first time. We are currently aware of sixteen carpets sharing similar colours, technique and style that form the so-called 'Sanguszko' group. There are differences in structure, but the consistency of style is so compelling that some may have been made in the same city, and indeed some from the same workshop. The carpets are scattered throughout the world; the small number of people who have been able to examine some have had to rely mostly on notes and memory. The published comments have often been based upon the study of illustrations, usually only in black and white. The author has had the opportunity to see fourteen and physically examine nine of the sixteen carpets. Today, with the advantage of high-resolution colour images, it is possible to re-examine these.

In 1976, **Michael Franses** co-founded the International Conference on Oriental Carpets and *Hali*, the International Journal for Carpets & Textiles; he was the publisher, co-editor and principal shareholder until 1986 and has continued as a regular contributor. In 2009, he re-acquired *Hali* and is presently the chairman. He was the owner of The Textile Gallery and Longevity Textile Conservation between 1971-2009, when he retired to devote his autumn years to full-time research and publishing. He was the recipient of the Washington Textile Museum's 2010 George Hewitt Myers Award, in recognition of his lifetime contributions. Between 2011 and 2016, he was Director of Special Cultural Projects at Qatar Museums. He is currently a Research Associate at the Textile Museum, Washington DC and at the Museum of Islamic Art, Berlin.

## Sunday 12 May

10.30-11.10

### ***Shi'i rulers, Safavid Alliance, and the Religious-Political Landscape of the Deccan*** *Roy Fischel, SOAS University of London*

The rise of the Safavids and the introduction of Imami Shi'ism inaugurated a major shift in the religious and political landscape far beyond Iran. In the Deccan, local dynasties began to present their Shi'i inclination not only as a religious marker but also as a means to associate themselves with the Safavids in an effort to counter Mughal pressure. This association, however, assumed that the Shi'ism of local sultans determined the nature of elite politics in the Deccan as a whole, marked by a set of all-encompassing dichotomies (Muslim/Hindu or Sunni/Shi'i). In this paper I question the meaning of being a Shi'i ruler in the Deccan for the political and social realities. Focusing on the sultanate of Bijapur, I argue that the religion of the ruler served as only one component in shaping public life. Rather, political and social realities encouraged flexible and multifaceted attitudes and directions, Shi'i and non-Shi'i alike.

**Roy Fischel** is a Lecturer in the History of South Asia at SOAS University of London. He works on the political and social history of pre-colonial India, in particular the early modern period, with special focus on the Deccan Sultanates and the Mughal Empire. His work discusses questions of state formation, circulation, and empire in precolonial South Asia, around the Indian Ocean, and on the global arena. He is currently finalizing the manuscript of the monograph *Local States in an Imperial World: Identity, Society and Politics in the early modern Deccan* (Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming).

11.10-11.50

### ***Peculiarities of the Safavid Policy towards Eastern Georgia*** *George Sanikidze, Institute of Oriental Studies of the Ilia State University, Tbilisi*

The paper deals with the evolution of Iran's policy towards Eastern Georgia (Gorjestan) in the Safavid period. Three periods are distinguished and the main characteristics of their relationships are studied: 1) The 16<sup>th</sup> century, from the rule of Shah Ismail till Shah 'Abbas I. 2) The Shah 'Abbas epoch. 3) After Shah 'Abbas till the fall of Safavids. Particular attention is given to the study of relations during the third period. Several primary sources are investigated for the study of specific relations during this epoch. This specific situation can be considered in the framework of the asymmetric model of imperial organization. The Imperial Centre does not attempt to change the semi-independent social structures and economic arrangements of the periphery. The goal of the Safavids was not full integration of Gorjestan into the empire (accordingly, neither its Iranization or Islamization) but to secure the loyalty of the local authorities by different means (such as granting pensions, creating controlling structures).

**George Sanikidze** is Professor at Ilia State University, Georgia (Head of the programme of Middle Eastern Studies) and Director of the G. Tsereteli Institute of Oriental Studies at the same University. His research topics include the history and politics of Middle Eastern countries (especially Iran) and of the Caucasus, Medieval and Modern history of Islam and East-West interactions. He has been working as a visiting scholar at Paris-Sorbonne-III and Paris-Sorbonne-IV Universities, University of California – Berkeley and the Universities of Hokkaido and Osaka, Japan. G. Sanikidze is the author of up to 70 scientific works. His works are published in Georgia, UK, France, Japan, USA, Holland, Turkey, Iran and elsewhere.

11.50-12.30

### ***The Safavids and the Uzbeks*** *Florian Schwarz, Institute of Iranian Studies, Austrian Academy of Sciences*

The wall paintings in the central banquet hall of the Chehel Sotun palace pavilion in Isfahan, depicting amiable receptions for Uzbek Khans alongside a rather grim panorama of Shah Ismail's victory over Muhammad Shibani Khan, founder of the Shibanid-Uzbek state, provides vivid testimony for the significance of Iran's northeastern neighbours for the Safavids. The complex relations between the two realms cannot be reduced to dichotomies of creed (Sunni vs. Shi'i or Uzbek vs. Qizilbash) or conflicting interests and claims in Khurasan, but play out on many levels and in many shades of ideological, political, artistic, religious, intellectual, social and economic interactions, in which moments of strong tension alternated with quite peaceful phases. This paper will explore how these interactions shaped the Safavid and Shibanid empire-building projects, and how they may have contributed to transforming the political, cultural and social perceptions of Iran and Transoxania.

**Florian Schwarz** is Director of the Institute for Iranian Studies at the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna, Austria, and affiliate professor for Iranian Studies at the University of Vienna. Following his PhD in 1998 from the University of Tübingen, he taught Islamic Studies at the University of Bochum (Ruhr-Universität Bochum) and Middle Eastern and Central Asian History at the University of Washington in Seattle. He is the author of monographs and articles on the history of medieval to early modern Middle East, Iran and Central Asia.

12.30-1.00

### **Closing Remarks**

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## A Symposium

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Saturday 11 & Sunday 12 May 2019

Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre

SOAS University of London

Russel Square

London WC1H 0XG

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### Convened by:

Sarah Stewart, SOAS University of London and

Charles Melville, University of Cambridge

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