

Editorial

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This special issue of *Iran Namag* is a Festschrift compiled in honor of a mentor and a great scholar of Perso–Iranian Studies, Professor Maria Subtelny. As a Festschrift, it brings together a sample of scholars whose works and lives have been influenced by Prof. Subtelny’s scholarship and friendship. On a personal note, I was studying modern Iranian literature and culture when I took a course on premodern Persian mystical literature with Prof. Subtelny at the University of Toronto. That course entirely changed the direction of my academic life as I went on to write my doctoral dissertation under her supervision. The present collection of essays celebrates Prof. Subtelny’s achievement and contribution to the field of Iranian studies up to now.

A Few Words about Professor Subtelny

Born in Toronto of Ukrainian refugee parents, Prof. Subtelny attended the University of Toronto, where she graduated with an Honours BA in Islamic studies in 1972, having studied Arabic, Turkish, and Persian languages and literatures. In 1979, she received her PhD from Harvard University after completing her dissertation on “The Poetic Circle at the Court of the Timurid Sultan Husain Baiqara and Its Political Significance.” In 1984, she was appointed Mellon Assistant Professor in the Department of Middle East and Islamic Studies. She was granted tenure in 1989 and in 2004 promoted to Full Professor. From 1993



to 1996, she served as chair of the department, and from 1996 to 2001, as chair of the newly merged Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations. She has been teaching courses on Iranian history and classical Persian literature at the University of Toronto for almost forty years.

Prof. Subtelny's research interests have focused on the history and culture of Iran, primarily of the post-Mongol period. Her book *Timurids in Transition: Turko-Persian Politics and Acculturation in Medieval Iran*, published by Brill in 2007, for which she received the Houshang Pourshariati Book Award, applied the Weberian concept of the "routinization of charisma" to the case of the Timurid Dynasty, which ruled over Iran and Central Asia during the fifteenth century, in order to explain the process by which the descendants of Temür (Tamerlane) made the transition from a nomadic empire based on a booty economy to a sedentary polity based on the Perso-Islamic model. She demonstrated how the Timurids, a Turko-Mongolian tribal elite steeped in Chinggisid military traditions, reoriented the economic basis of the Timurid Empire toward the development of the intensive, irrigated agriculture of the eastern Iranian province of Khurasan (encompassing present-day eastern Iran, southern Turkmenistan, and northwestern Afghanistan), which would come to constitute the core of their realm. Taking advantage of the Islamic institution of the pious endowment (waqf), successive Timurid rulers, who sought to legitimate their rule over Iran, became patrons of the tomb shrines of prominent Muslim saints and divines in Khurasan, transforming them into large shrine complexes that functioned as efficient vehicles for managing the agricultural activity of the regions in which they were strategically located. In so doing, the Timurids—who are perhaps better known for their outstanding cultural patronage—became one of the great success stories in the agrarian history of the medieval eastern Islamic world. Focusing on the period of the rule of the last Timurid, Sultan Husain Bayqara (1469–1506), which lasted for almost forty years, the book demonstrated the impact of the adoption of Persian modes of bureaucratic and fiscal administration on the evolution of Timurid government as well as on the management of the great Timurid shrine complexes, such as the Ansari shrine at Herat and

the 'Alid shrine at Balkh (Mazar-i Sharif); it also offered new insights into Turko–Persian political relations and the complex process of the acculturation of Turko–Mongolian elites.

In 2001, Prof. Subtelny was invited to deliver the inaugural Ehsan and Latifeh Yarshater Distinguished Lectures on Iranian Studies in Paris. The resulting publication, entitled *Le monde est un jardin : Aspects de l'histoire culturelle de l'Iran médiéval (The World Is a Garden: Aspects of the Cultural History of Medieval Iran)*, published by Peeters in 2002, examined the theme of Iranian agriculture—its role in socioeconomic and political organization and its cultural resonance. The topics covered by the lectures included the bureaucratic administration of a society based on irrigation agriculture; the impact of the agrarian economy on the formulation of concepts of rulership and justice; the link between the Islamic pious endowment (waqf) and economic development; and the role of the Persian garden as a microcosm of Persian culture and the expression of this idea in Persian literature, particularly of the mystical variety. In 2004, the book won the first Saidi-Sirjani Award.

While her articles represent a broad range of topics, including Persian garden design, Persian manuscript studies, Persian mysticism, and the Islamic occult sciences, she has had an abiding interest in the genre of advice literature in Persian, especially of the “mirrors for princes” type. Her current projects include an edition, commentary, and translation of the *Akhlaq-i muhsini (Ethics for Muhsin)* by the Persian polymath Husayn Va'iz Kashifi, which he composed at the beginning of the sixteenth century for the son of the Timurid ruler Sultan Husain Bayqara. A prosimetrical work, it is a summa of Perso–Islamic advice literature and was highly influential at both the Mughal and Ottoman courts. A related research project is the study of a manuscript of the pseudo-Aristotelian work known as *Sirr al-asrar (The Secret of Secrets)* that was produced in the atelier of the bibliophile Timurid prince Baysunghur Mirza in the first half of the fifteenth century. It purports to be advice on rulership that was conveyed to Alexander the Great in correspondence with his teacher, Aristotle. The work achieved

great renown in Europe as the *Secretum secretorum* and was equally important in the Islamic world, being translated from the original Arabic into Persian and Ottoman Turkish.

Prof. Subtelny has conducted research on Arabic and Persian manuscripts in many libraries of the world, from Tashkent to Istanbul and from Saint Petersburg to London, and has been a frequent presenter at international conferences. She has been a teacher and mentor to many graduate students and either supervised them directly or was a member of their supervisory committees. Many of her former students are now holding academic positions at prestigious universities or working on research projects of global scope.

Contents of This Volume

The range of topics presented in this volume, arranged in chronological order, show the depth and breadth of Prof. Subtelny's influence. The opening essay of this volume, by Shuntu Kuang, examines the Sasanian contacts with Imperial China constructed from direct quotations from Chinese primary sources, the first of which contacts occurred in 455 CE. These translations and annotations construct an overall picture of two centuries of Sino-Sasanian political relationship from an imperial Chinese perspective, which should prove helpful for non-Chinese researchers especially. Enrico Raffaelli's paper studies the headings that introduce the first texts of the collection of the short liturgies common to two important Zoroastrian manuscripts (dating to 1591 and 1601). Miguel Ángel Andrés-Toledo's essay is a study of the widespread motif of long-sleepers who were protected from death by divinities, as this motif was reshaped and incorporated into Jewish, Christian, Islamic, and Zoroastrian traditions. Nasrin Askari introduces a seventeenth-century prose abridgment of the *Shahnamah* produced by a Zoroastrian priest at the request of the president of the East India Company. Her examination of this manuscript, preserved in the Government Museum in Alwar, India, shows that the Zoroastrian author does not just summarize the *Shahnamah*, but also produces "correct" versions of ancient Persian tales by interpolating accounts from Zoroastrian sources.

Gyongyi Hegedus's entry offers a comparative investigation of a Muslim and a Jewish text produced in the first part of the tenth century: the text of the *Ikhwan as-Safa'* and Saadya Gaon's commentary on the *Sefer Yezirah*. She concludes that in both sources, illumination implies a transformation of the mind through which it understands the coercion and prison of natural law as a self-articulation of God. Abolfazl Moshiri draws our attention to Suhrawardi's Sufism, which is often overshadowed and neglected by his philosophical works. By situating him within the framework of Iranian Sufism, he shows that Suhrawardi was first and foremost a practicing Sufi, and viewed Sufism as the cornerstone of his world view. Charles Melville's entry examines the ways in which 'Ata-Malik Juvaini (d. 1283) gave a heroic reading and a legendary quality to the account of Jalal al-Din, son of the last Khwarazmshah, who leaped into the Indus River to avoid defeat and capture by Mongol forces.

What did the Timurids, these inheritors of the Mongol Empire, think about their Mongol roots while professing Islam and being receptive to Persian culture? The ethno-political identity of the Timurids is the subject of Joo-Yup Lee's essay, which answers this question based on examining a broad range of sources in Persian and Turkic languages. Next, in his examination of the *Risāla-yi mūchalga* attributed to Sayyid 'Ali Hamadani (d. 1385), Devin DeWeese explores the political and social environment of the eastern Islamic world, which was dominated through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries by Turko-Mongol elites. The author of this short Sufi treatise, the title of which includes a word drawn from the languages of the Mongols, argues that the ability of diverse languages to express divine truths undermines narrow religious and social exclusivism and justifies those who seek hidden realities.

With Colin Mitchell's essay, we enter the Safavid era and the examination of the Safavid shahs' conception of their sovereignty in terms of embodiment and corporeality. By examining chronicles, poetry, epistolary material, and other sources, he redirects traditional conceptions of Safavid royal identity as a crude and rushed amalgam of *ghuluw* Sufism and Twelver Shi'ism to the continuation of a much larger and

more pervasive dialogue on the nature of sovereignty in Perso–Islamic societies since the advent of the Mongols in the early fourteenth century. Matthew Melvin-Koushki studies a mid-seventeenth-century Safavid *Majmu‘a* consisting entirely of occultist texts, giving us a window onto the political, social, religious, and intellectual horizons of early Safavid Iran. He shows the importance of occult sciences for many eminent thinkers and doers of the era as a primary means of living philosophy, and of popular Persian occult-scientific manuals for the gradual Shi‘itization of Iran. Maryam Moazzen discusses *Himam al-thawāqib*, a work of advice literature written for the Safavid king by the *shaykh al-Islam* of Isfahan, ‘Ali Naqi Kamarahi (d. 1650). This book presents an important link between the appropriation of ancient ideals of governance and intense emphasis on the supremacy of Shi‘ism and the Shi‘a.

Two entries in this volume focus on Perso–Islamic art. Karin Rührdanz studies the pictorial program of a small illustrated Persian manuscript preserved at the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, made for the Timurid Sultan Abu Sa‘id (d. 1469). And Lisa Golombek’s essay is a study of a group of tile arches stylistically datable to the end of Safavid Shah Sulayman’s reign (c. 1685–90). One set of tile arches, she argues, provides a clue to the program behind the selection of scenes that revolve around the following themes: Abrahamic, ‘Alid, *futuwwa*, and Shah Sulayman’s contemporary events.

In a more contemporary context, we have Marta Simidchieva’s exploration of Sadiq Hidayat’s novel *The Blind Owl* (published 1936–37). Whereas previous scholarship has equated the bipartite structure of this text with the worlds of dreams and reality, past and present, or traditional and modern aesthetics, she entertains the possibility that *The Blind Owl* may very well be inspired by the philosophy of Illumination espoused by Suhrawardi (d. 1191). Reza Shah Pahlavi’s vision of the Iranian woman as the symbol of the modernizing country provides the backdrop of Rivanne Sandler’s paper on the first generation of modern Iranian women memoirists (born in the first half of the twentieth century). By studying the content of memoirs by four women, Taj al-Saltana (d. 1936 in Iran), Sattareh Farman Farmaian (d. 2012 in

the United States), Najmeh Najafi, and Shusha Guppy (d. 2008 in the United Kingdom), Sandler depicts a picture of these women that emerges out of the intersection of complex government social engineering projects and the patriarchal expectations of women's behavior and their lived experiences.

The Persian section of this volume includes an article by Shafique Virani examining the history of Nizari Ismailis, from Marco Polo's fantastic legend of the Old Man of the Mountain to the orientalist recycling of the myth of the Assassins. His essay offers corrective insights in light of recently discovered texts that have survived from the early Alamut period of Ismaili Muslim history.

Professor Subtelny's Publications

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