

International Conference

**Femininity and Masculinity
in Persian Culture and Literature**



Image: Reclining Figure, attributed to Iran, 1630-40 (Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art, objectnr. 12.223.3).

Utrecht University
Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies
Sweelinckzaal
Drift 21, room 0.05
Thursday 11 and Friday 12 April 2024

Femininity and Masculinity in Persian Culture and Literature

Gender and sexuality are among the most controversial yet understudied areas in Persian culture and literature. As an indispensable part of Persian culture, poetry has played a major role in shaping concepts such as femininity and masculinity. For example, one of the major genres of Persian poetry in which male Persian poets have created their masterpieces is the genre of romance. This genre centers around the two key concepts of masculinity and femininity and the interplay between them. Such literary heritage informs us about the male poets' perspective about gender and power dynamics. The other players of the arena of poetry, female poets, bring in a different perspective into the scene. One example is the Īnjū'īd princess, Jahān-Malik Khātūn (d. about 1393). With a *Dīvān* of 15 thousand couplets, three times larger than that of her contemporary world-renowned poet, Ḥāfiẓ (d. 1390), she complained about being ostracised. In the preface she wrote to her *Dīvān*, she excused herself for entering the craft of poetry as a woman. Parvīn I'tiṣāmī (d. 1941) is a more contemporary example of being subject to gender bias in the world of Persian literature. Being disbelieved as a female poet, she wrote a poem to assert that she was a woman.

The paradoxical overview of gender in the Persian literary tradition brings to mind questions such as: How does this imbalance crystallise in Persian poetry? How do Persian poets incorporate the patriarchal gender construct into their narratives? How does such a liminal gender construct influence the particular dynamics of genres such as the romance in Persian poetry? How did male Persian poets contribute to perpetuating the biased gender construct of femininity in their work? How did female poets deal with gender-biased power dynamics? If the patriarchal gender norms promote leaving women out of the arena of poetry, how does the communication of the genders take place in a genre like romance?

Programme Thursday 11 April 2024

09.00 Welcome and opening Asghar Seyed-Gohrab & Zhinia Noorian

Session One: Chair Asghar Seyed-Gohrab

09.15 **Dick Davis (Ohio University, keynote)**

The Vale of Soul-Making: the Evolution of the Persian Verse Romance from Gorgani to Jami

10.15 **Christine Kämpfer (Bamberg University)**

The Many Faces of Humāyūn: Portraying a Chinese Princess in Persian Epic Poetry Premodern

10.45 *Break*

Session Two: Chair Maarten Holtzapffel

11.00 **Mehrdad Alipour (Utrecht University)**

(Mis)application of Modern Gender and Sexuality language to Premodern Culture: the case of Persian literary discourse

11.30 **Pegah Shahbaz (University of Göttingen) and
Hamed Nayyeri-Adl (MA, University of Göttingen)**

Exploring the Dynamics of Femininity and Masculinity in the Romance of Mahsatī Ganjavī wa Amīr Ahmad

12.00 *Lunch (Only for speakers)*

Thursday 11 April 2024

Session Three: Arash Ghajarjazi

- 13.30 **Zhinia Noorian (Utrecht University)**
Qalandarī Motifs in ghazals by Jahān-Malik Khātūn (d. after 784/1382)
- 14.00 **Fatemeh Naghshvarian (Utrecht University)**
Femininity and Masculinity in Feyzi's Nal-u Daman
- 14.30 **Joanna Szklarz (Siedlce University)**
Estranged Sun? Gordāfarid of Firdowsī's Šāh-nāma - a female warrior in pre-Islamic Iran

15.00 *Break*

Session Four: Zhinia Noorian

The panel on visual culture of the Zan Zendegi Azadi protests

- 15.30 **Pooyan Tamimi-Arab (Utrecht University)**
Woman, Life, Freedom: book publications on Iranian feminist protest art
- 16.00 **Beri Shalmashi (Screenwriter and Director)**
The Fire in Their Eyes: The deep roots of Woman, Life, Freedom
- 16.30 **Sara Emami (UX designer working at Philips)**
*“Did you know that letting your hair blow in the wind in Iran is a crime?”
Visual culture activism in support of the Woman Life Freedom protests*
- 17.00 *Break*
- 17.30 **Marjane Satrapi (Author, Film director and Script writer)**
Woman, Life, Freedom (online lecture)

Programme Friday 12 April 2024

Session Five: Chair Asghar Seyed-Gohrab

- 09.00 **Christine van Ruymbeke (University of Cambridge) (keynote)**
An emperor accused of sexual transgression. What is really happening between Bahram Gur and his musician slave girl?
- 10.00 **Jacomien Prins (Utrecht University) and Razieh S. Mousavi (Ca' Foscari University of Venice)**
Gendered Conceptions of Cosmic Harmony and Ethics in Nizāmī's Haft Paykar
- 10.30 **Asghar Seyed-Gohrab (Utrecht University)**
Kiarostami's Shirin and Nezami's Khosrow and Shirin
- 11.00 *Break*

Session Six: Chair Leila Rahimi Bahmany

- 11.30 **Amir Moosavi (Rutgers University-Newark)**
Spaces of Their Own: The Production of Feminine Ecologies in Contemporary Persian Fiction
- 12.00 **Mahroo Moosavi (Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz)**
The Psychic-Civic Operability of Safavid Shahr-āshūb(s): Early Modern Literary Interpretations of Gendered Agency
- 12.30 *Lunch (Only for speakers)*

Programme Friday 12 April 2024

Session Seven: Chair Fatemeh Naghshvarian

- 13.30 **Allison Kanner-Botan (University of Colorado)**
A Pact Between Conflicting Codes: Javānmardī in Nezāmī's Laylī and Majnūn
- 14.00 **Mira de Boose (Utrecht University)**
Femininity and Masculinity: The Character of Vis in Gorgāni's Vis-o-Rāmin
- 14.30 *Break*

Session Eight: Chair Alexandra Nieweg

- 15.00 **Domenico Ingenito (University of California) (keynote)**
Renegotiating Gender and Sex in Persian Literature: Sa'di Shirazi, Jahan Malek Khatun and Forugh Farrokhzad
- 16.00 **Asghar Seyed-Gohrab (Utrecht University)**
Wrapping up

The Vale of Soul-Making: the Evolution of the Persian Verse Romance from Gorgani to Jami

(Dick Davis)

Concentrating on three narratives, Gorgani's Vis and Ramin, Nezami's Khosrow and Shirin, and Jami's Salaman and Absal, the talk will trace the gradual spiritualization of the romance, and the way that this radically rewrites the roles of the female protagonists within the genre.

Dick Davis is Professor Emeritus of Persian at Ohio State University. He has written scholarly works on both English and Persian literature, as well as nine volumes of his own poetry; his publications include volumes of poetry and verse translation chosen as books of the year by The Sunday Times (UK) 1989; The Daily Telegraph (UK) 1989; The Economist (UK) 2002; The Washington Post 2010, and The Times Literary Supplement (UK) 2013 and 2018, which has referred to him as “our finest translator from Persian”. He has published numerous book-length verse translations from Persian, including seven volumes of translations of medieval Persian poetry with Penguin Classics.

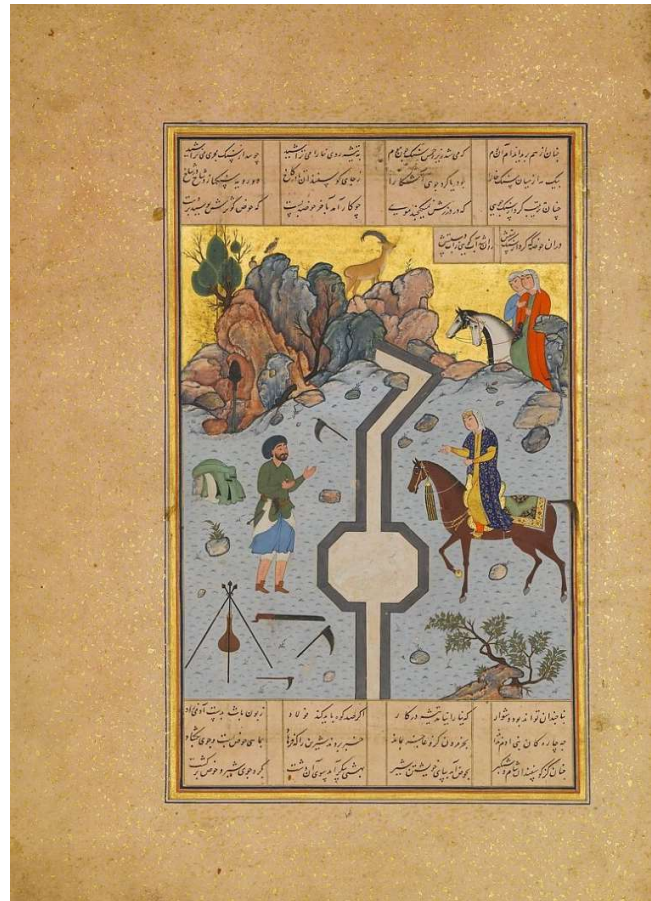


Image: "Farhad Carves a Milk Channel for Shirin", Folio 74 from a Khamsa (Quintet) of Nizami of Ganja. Calligraphy by Sultan Muhammad Nur and Mahmud Muzahib. Painting by Shaikh Zada, Herat, 1524-1525 (Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art, objectnr. 13.228.7.5.).

*The Many Faces of Humāyūn: Portraying a Chinese Princess in Persian Epic Poetry
Premodern*

(Christine Kämpfer)

Persian epic poetry holds a profound admiration for its female characters, portraying them as independent figures such as princesses, queens, warriors, and saviors. While many of these female characters are connected to historical figures from pre-Islamic Persia, a shift occurs in the 14th century after the Mongol invasion, leading to a transformation in the portrayal of women in romantic epics. Khvājū Kirmānī's romantic epic "Humāy-u Humāyūn," composed in 1331 at the court of the last Ilkhanid ruler in Baghdad, serves as a pivotal point in this evolution. The epic recounts the tale of Humāy, a Syrian prince who falls in love with a painting of the Chinese princess Humāyūn, prompting him to embark on an adventurous journey to find her. The epic exudes a strong mystical undertone, at the same time, it also incorporates elements from popular romances. Princess Humāyūn's character is particularly intriguing in this context, as she lacks a historical model, allowing Khvājū to shape her according to his authorial intent. Transcending her initial role as a static painting, Humāyūn transforms into an active protagonist who even disguises herself as a man to engage in combat with the prince. This paper aims to explore the multifaceted roles of Humāyūn in relation to the various interpretations of the epic. While Humāyūn lacks a historical precedent, there are other princesses who may have influenced Khvājū's portrayal of her character.

Christine Kämpfer is Assistant Professor for Iranian Studies at the University of Bamberg. She obtained her M.A. in Iranian Studies from the University of Marburg (2013) and her Ph.D. from the University of Bamberg (2022). Her primary research area is pre modern epic poetry with a dissertation entitled Khvājū Kirmānī's Epos Humāy-u Humāyūn: Die Neuerfindung der persischen Romanze im 14. Jahrhundert" ["Khvājū Kirmānī's epic Humāy-u Humāyūn: Reinventing the Persian romance in the 14th century"]. Excerpts of her research have been published in the collected volumes *Schaffen und Nachahmen: Kreative Prozesse im Mittelalter* (ed. Volker Leppin, Berlin: De Gruyter 2021) and "Selected Studies on Genre in Middle Eastern Literatures: From Epics to Novels" (ed. Hülya Çelik and Petr Kučera, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2023). From 2017 to 2021, she also contributed as a research associate to a project focusing on Qajar travelogue literature, excerpts from the project have been published in the collected volume "On the Way to the "(Un)Known"? The Ottoman Empire in Travelogues (c. 1450 1900)" (ed. Doris Gruber and Arno Strohmeyer, Berlin: De

Gruyter, 2022). A reading edition of the travelogue written by the German botanist Carl Haussknecht, recounting his travels to Qajar Persia during the 1860s, is currently in progress.

(Mis)application of Modern Gender and Sexuality language to Premodern Culture: the case of Persian literary discourse

(Mehrdad Alipour)

The very modern culture has produced various gender, sex, and sexuality categories, terminologies, and discourses, such as transgenderism, intersexuality, masculinity, femininity, homosexuality, bisexuality, and heterosexuality. While sometimes vernacular culture and a group of scholars tend to generalise these categories and apply them beyond their specific time, geographical space, and cultural context, prevalent gender and sexuality theories presume that such categories are socially constructed and do not subsist apart from their cultural contexts and historical circumstances. Focusing on premodern Persian literary works (dominantly poetry and prose), Mehrdad will examine several such gender and sexuality compartments, including masculinity and femininity. He will attest that the constructed social meaning given to such categorical discourses have differed and continue to differ, depending on cultural and historical contexts of modern and premodern Persian world. Therefore, overlooking such variations or sensitive factors shall cause the misapplication of such categories, terminologies, or discourses between and across the modern and premodern eras. This, in turn, shall negatively affect LGBTQIA+ individuals or emancipation movements. Thus, it can ultimately result in irrevocable political, religious, or societal turmoil and harms, particularly for those who live in Muslim societies.

Mehrdad Alipour is a post-doctorate research fellow at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Utrecht University. His study mainly focuses on pre-modern and modern Islamic law, legal theory, Shi'i studies, and Iranian intellectual traditions. He is in particular interested in the transformation of Islamic legal and ethical traditions concerning gender, sex, and sexuality diversity in the premodern and modern eras. Currently, Mehrdad is conducting his Veni awarded project titled "Beyond Binaries: Intersex in Islamic Legal Tradition" to examine intersex identity as a non-binary sex and/or gender in Shi'i legal tradition between the 14th and early 20th centuries. His book, *Negotiating Homosexuality in Islam: A Legal-Hermeneutical Examination of Modern Shi'i Discourse* (Brill, 2024) is the first academic exploration of discursive space(s) for debating homosexuality in modern Shi'i legal context.

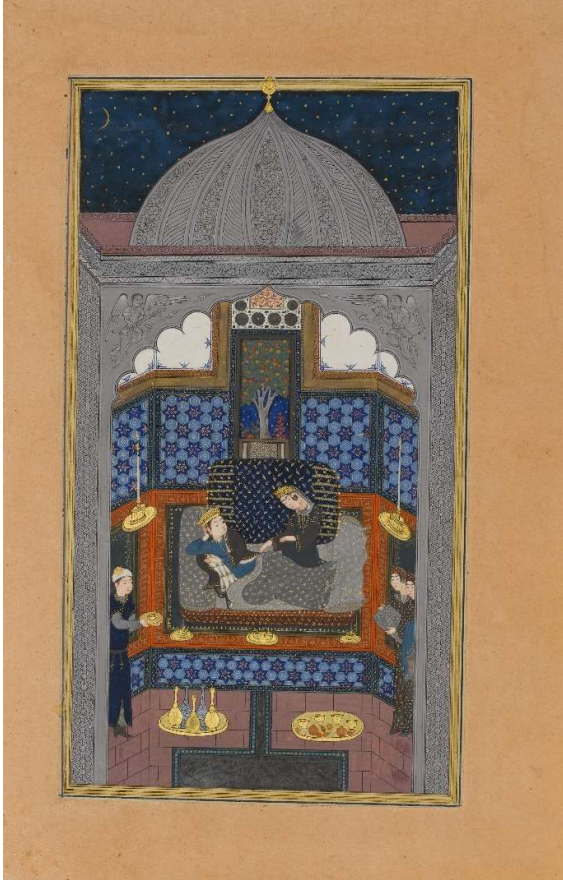
His recent publications include: “Homosexuality in the Prospect of Before Revelation,” in *Wege zu einer Ethik*, edited by Alsoufi , Kurnaz, & Sievers (Nomos Publishing House, 2023); “Ethical Assessment of Acts in the Prospect of Before Revelation: an Examination of Šarīf al-Murtaḍā’s Approach,” in *Wege zu einer Ethik*, edited by Alsoufi , Kurnaz, & Sievers (Nomos Publishing House, 2023); and "The Nexus between Gender-Confirming Surgery and Illness: Legal-Hermeneutical Examinations of Four Islamic Fatwas," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* (18(3), 2022).

Exploring the Dynamics of Femininity and Masculinity in the Romance of Mahsatī Ganjavī wa Amīr Ahmad

(Pegah Shahbaz and Hamed Nayyeri-Adl)

Mahsatī Ganjavī, the prominent Persian poetess of the medieval period, has a significant semilegendary appearance in a romance titled *Mahsatī Ganjavī wa Amīr Ahmad*. The Persian romance dates back to the 9th/15th century and depicts the love story of Mahsatī and Amīr Ahmad in prose, including several *kharābātī* quatrains attributed to the poetess, inserted within the dialogues between all characters of the story. The text has long been regarded as a primary source for Mahsatī’s quatrains. However, extensive research by Fritz Meier (1963) has revealed that many of the poems in this text are not hers. Different versions and manuscripts of this love story remain unpublished and unexplored in the literary sphere. One often-overlooked aspect of this romance is the intricate and intense dialogue between femininity and masculinity, manifested in the male and female protagonists’ interplay. The dialogues, rich in complexity, provide a unique lens through which the dynamics of gender in the 15th century can be examined. Certain sequences in the story recall plots and themes known in classical Persian literature, that challenge the ideas about carnal desire and spiritual passion in both mystical and lyrical genres. In this study, we will introduce this unpublished romance, emphasizing its significance in the context of Persian narrative literature. Subsequently, the nuanced interplay between femininity and masculinity within the narrative will be meticulously analyzed from a narratorial perspective, shedding light on the deeper dimensions of this age-old manuscript. We will see to what extent the narrative exposes conformity to the social norms of the period about gender roles in the descriptions of feminine physical beauty, social discretion, and the display of traditional patterns of love in Persian literature. How does the story manifest any forms of opposition to the accepted norms by the overt exposure of desire, seduction and unveiled communication between the lovers? What value(s) do(es) rhyme in quatrains add to

the performability of the narrative language as a means of gender expression? How are masculine and feminine voices echoed in this narrative? These are some of the questions that we intend to answer in our presentation.



Pegah Shahbaz specializes in classical Persian literature. She received her PhD in Persian Studies from the University of Strasbourg, France and currently works as a lecturer at Institute of Iranian Studies, Georg August University of Göttingen, Germany, where she teaches literature and history courses at graduate level. She is also the section editor of the Fables and Tales chapter of the Perso-Indica project. Her work of research is focused on questions of narratology, translation and systems of knowledge transmission in the Persianate world, and the reception and domestication of Indian literary and cultural heritage in the Persian language from the tenth to the nineteenth centuries. Pegah Shahbaz has a record of publications in peer-reviewed

journals, proceedings and compiled books. She conducts scientific collaboration through a wide network of scholars of Persian and Islamic studies and collaborates as member and scientific partner with various research projects at Asian, European and North American universities. Her two ongoing research projects are focused on the Persian narrative traditions in Punjab (9th-19th cents.), and the fourteenth-century historiographies and hagiographies of the Buddha in the Persian language.

Image: "Bahram Gur and the Indian Princess in the Dark Palace on Saturday", Folio 23v from a Haft Paikar (Seven Portraits) of the Khamsa (Quintet) of Nizami of Ganja. Calligrapher Maulana Azhar, Herat, ca. 1430 (Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art, objectnr. 13.228.13.4).

Hamed Nayyeri-Adl has a diverse academic background and extensive experience in the fields of psychology, literature, and journalism. He obtained an M.A. in Iranian and Persianate Studies at Georg August University of Göttingen, Germany, after obtaining an M.A. in Psychology in Iran, where he explored Persian jokes about family from a psychoanalytic perspective in his dissertation. Additionally, he holds a bachelor's degree in Persian Language and Literature from the University of Allameh Tabataba'i, Tehran. His academic interests include Persian narrative literature, narratology, and psychoanalytic literary criticism. His scholarly contributions extend to publications. He has authored papers such as "On Fictionality of a Preface: Borzūy's Chapter in Kalīla wa Demna, its Features and Functions" (under revision) which is going to be presented in the forthcoming symposium of Association for Iranian Studies. Additionally, he has worked as an editor for approximately 70 Persian books and as a translator for various articles featured in Tehran Review of Books. His professional journey includes roles such as a psychoanalytic psychotherapist for five years, and as the deputy editor for the quarterly Tehran Review of Books since January 2008. He has also worked as a copy editor and then the manager at Mosafer Publication from 2010 to 2016.

Qalandarī Motifs in ghazals by Jahān-Malik Khātūn (d. after 784/1382)

(Zhinia Noorian)

Jahān-Malik Khātūn is the only Persian female poet from the mediaeval times whose collection of poetry or at least most of it has reached us. She is the only female poet of mediaeval times who compiled her poetry collection and wrote a preface to it. The main focus of my research is to investigate this female poet's stance towards concepts such as belief, disbelief, and the predominant Qalandariyya Sufi mode of expression of spirituality. Dick Davis uses 'literary Sufism' to refer to the close interactions between Sufism and Persian poetry. He believes that in some poets' work, Sufism is sincere and plays a central role, while in some others' poetry it can be the deployment of a rhetoric in vogue (Dick Davis. *Faces of Love*, xi). The poetry of Jahān-Malik Khātūn's contemporary renowned poets such as Ḥāfiz (d. 1390), for example, is permeated with themes and motifs that can have Qalandarī implications. No study has been conducted on the intellectual contribution of women in this era. According to historical accounts produced by men for men of power and status, such as kings and rulers, women did not have access to formal education, as men did. As far as historical texts let us know, education was a rarity for women. What is remarkable about the availability of Jahān-Malik Khātūn's poetry in such a context is that it provides us with a comparable parallel to the poetry of world-

class male poets such as Ḥāfīz. These two poets, although incomparable in their gender-bound privileges, shared some of the particularities of this historical context. Though with different relationships, they shared access to the court, the locus of power to present their mastery in the craft of poetry. My original contribution to knowledge by this research is to shed light on the role of Jahān-Malik Khātūn in shaping the intellectual history of Iran. Within the ERC Advanced Grant project, the findings of this study will show the gender-related aspects of the Qalandariyya movement in this era in Iran.

Zhinia Noorian is a postdoctoral researcher for the ERC Advanced Grant, Beyond Sharia: The Role of Sufism in Shaping Islam, in the department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Utrecht University. She is currently working on the gender-related aspects of the Qalandariyya movement in the thirteenth century. Her main focus is on the poetry of Jahān-Malik Khātūn (d. about 1382), the most prolific, and the only published female poet of the mediaeval Persian times.

Femininity and Masculinity in Feyzi's Nal-u Daman

(Fatemeh Naghshvarian)

Abu'l-Feyz Ibn Mubārak (1547-1595), also known as Feyzī or Feyzī Fayyāzī, served as the Indian poet laureate at the Mughal court during Emperor Akbar's reign (r.1542-1605). Proficient in Persian, Arabic, and Sanskrit, Feyzī undertook the task of reinventing the Indian narrative of Nal-u Daman into Persian upon the request of the emperor. This endeavour became part of the bigger project of the poet, wherein he embarked on crafting a *khamisa* (“Quintet”), in imitation of the great Persian poet, Nizāmī Ganjavī (1141-1209). Feyzī's *Nal-u Daman*, derived from a segment within the Sanskrit *Mahabhārāta*, served as a literary response to Nizāmī's *Leylī and Majnūn*. Engaging in a nuanced reinterpretation of an Indian epic narrative, grounded in the Persian literary framework within the romance genre, Feyzī's literary synthesis exemplifies a unique perspective into the early modern Indo-Persian literary conceptions of femininity and masculinity. Feyzī's retelling of *Nal-u Daman* is an exploration of the concept of ‘love’ and the intricate dynamics inherent in the relationship between the lover and the beloved.

In Feyzī's poetic rendition, King Nal's misfortunes begin with the onset of love sickness (*sowda*), compelling him to undergo a tripartite evolution of love—progressing from the interplay of love and intellect (*'aql*), love and beauty (*ḥusn*), to love and madness (*junūn*). Having lost his kingdom in a game of gamble, Nal is sent into exile accompanied by his beloved

Daman. The protagonists, deprived of their material belongings, traverse the forest and encounter various adventures. Within the narrative, the character of Daman assumes a passive role, existing as the object of desire (but, lit. “idol”), while Nal emerges as an active participant and agent throughout the unfolding events. Feyzī's Nal-u Daman offers a lacuna to revisit gender constructs originating from the intersection of Indian epic and Persian romance genres.

Initially, this study employs a formalistic analysis to explore the portrayal of femininity and masculinity in Feyzī's Nal-u Daman. Employing character distribution analysis, speech turns evaluation, and a comparative examination of male and female depictions, supplemented by a focus on time and setting, the research aims to identify patterns regarding the representation of female and male characters in the text. Furthermore, situating Feyzī within the broader Persianate literary heritage prompts an exploration into how Feyzī deviates from established norms in the portrayal of characters.

Fatemeh Naghshvarian is a PhD candidate for the ERC Advanced Grant Beyond Sharia, related to the project Qalandars in the ‘Divine Religion’ in India. In her dissertation, she aims to navigate the impact of Islamic critical thinking on shaping the political implications of Divine Religion and ‘Universal Peace’ in 16th-century Mughal India. Fatemeh did her graduate studies in Cultural Studies (MA) and Digital Humanities (MS) at the University of Leuven (K.U. Leuven), Belgium.



Image: “Khusrau and Shirin”, poem by Hatifi, painting and calligraphy by Suzi, , dated 1498-99, Turkey (Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art, objectnr. 69.27).

Gordāfarid of Firdowsī's Šāh-nāma - a female warrior in pre-Islamic Iran

(Joanna Szklarz)

Šāh-nāma by Firdowsī is a late 10th and early 11th century chronicle that provides us with a wealth of information about culture of pre-Islamic Iran. Roughly 2/3 of the Šāh-nāma contains supernatural elements making a story not so much about historical facts as a retelling of the myths and legends on which Persia's civilization grew. Gordāfarid, the Iranian female warrior to whom Joanna dedicates this article, appears in this very section. In the epic we find two diametrically opposed descriptions of duels fought by women. The protagonist of the first, clearly expanded, is Gordāfarid, daughter of Gaždaham and her opponent is Rostam's son, Sohrāb. The heroine of the second scene is Gordiya, Bahrām VI Čōbīn's sister, a historical figure whose battle with Tovarg is reduced to two short sentences. The difference in length and style of Firdowsī's depiction of these scenes is striking and puzzling. In the article, Joanna submits for consideration the thesis that one of the reasons for this difference is that Gordāfarid, unlike Gordiya, is a fictional character, found in the heroic part of the epic. Unconcerned with the need to reflect the historical truth about the heroine (as in the case of Gordiya), Ferdowsī could have built Gordāfarid to represent the female warrior of pre-Islamic Iran present in both history and legends.

Joanna Szklarz is a student at the Doctoral School of Siedlce University, Department of History. She holds a master's degree in Polish philology and her thesis was in the field of literary studies. Currently she is researching duels in Firdowsī's Šāh-nāma as a source of knowledge about the culture of pre-Islamic Iran. She is the author of several articles based on her research on Šāh-nāma.

Woman, Life, Freedom: book publications on Iranian feminist protest art

(Pooyan Tamimi Arab)

Various scholars, journalists, and activists have observed that visuality was essential to the nationwide Woman Life Freedom protests in Iran, which were sparked by the death of Jina (Mahsa) Amini in 2022. In a digital culture revolving around social media such as Instagram, artistic and activist visions and imaginaries mediate Iranians' call for women's rights and the separation of religion and government. In this presentation, Pooyan will review three books that describe and constitute Iranian feminist protest art and visual culture: *Woman Life Freedom: Voices and Art from the Women's Protests in Iran*, edited by Malu Halasa (Saqi 2023); *Une révolution Iranienne : Femme, Vie, Liberté*, by Odile Burlaux and Hugo Vitrani; and *Femme vie liberté*, made and compiled by Marjane Satrapi.



By Sarah Emami

Pooyan Tamimi Arab is assistant professor of religious studies at Utrecht University. His work on Islam and contested visual culture recently appeared in chapters in the volumes *Provocative Images in Contemporary Islam* (Leiden UP 2023) and *Image Controversies: Contemporary Iconoclasm in Art, Media, and Cultural Heritage* (De Gruyter 2024). He currently works on secularization in Iran with GAMAAN – the Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in Iran; see the journal article co-authored with Ammar Maleki and Michael Stausberg, “Survey Zoroastrians: Online Religious Identification in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” published in 2023 in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, as well as the forthcoming chapter “The secular-religious divide in Iran: An analysis of GAMAAN’s online surveys,” which will be published in *Arguing with Allah, Questioning the Qur’an: Nonbelievers, Apostates, and Atheists in the Muslim World*, edited by Jack D. Eller and Natalie Khazaal (Routledge, forthcoming).

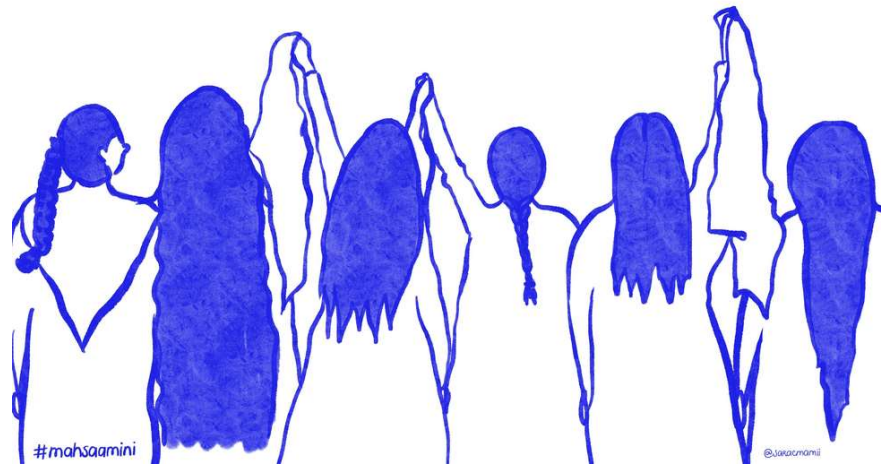
The Fire in Their Eyes: The deep roots of Woman, Life, Freedom

(Beri Shalmashi)

On invitation by arts centre De Kunstlinie, Beri Shalmashi curated *The Fire in Their Eyes* (Dec 2023 - March 2024), an international exhibition highlighting the work of twenty artists in relation to the philosophy of the slogan that (re)gained popularity during the 2022 protests in Iran. Shalmashi: ‘*The Fire in Their Eyes* follows the deep roots of jin, jiyān, azadī or zan, zendegi, azadi (woman, life, freedom). The slogan moves like a whirlpool through the Middle East, from the Kurdish female fighters in Rojava (Northern Syria) to the streets of Tehran. The exhibition passes people who carry the fire of their revolutions with their bare hands.’ In her presentation, Shalmashi describes the layers of this exhibition with a specific focus on the artworks, their relation to the revolutionary spirit in Iran, and artistic expression in diaspora.

Beri Shalmashi is a screenwriter and director. She graduated from the Netherlands Film Academy and holds a MA from the Utrecht School of Arts. Shalmashi's first film *Mama* (2010) was nominated for a Gouden Kalf and she won the prestigious Zilveren Camera with *Big Village* (2020). Shalmashi tutored at the film department of Salahadin University in Erbil (2012 - 2014) and at the Sandberg Institute in Amsterdam (2019 - 2021). She currently teaches a course at the Netherlands Film Academy and the postgraduate program at the Breitner Academy in Amsterdam. Last year she filmed for VPRO the documentary *At the Edge of the Revolution*, on the Kurdish Iraq - Iran border. In 2023, Shalmashi worked as a consultant for the Netherlands Film Fund and currently she is managing director at programme agency Avanti. The film *Casting Call*, which she wrote, was broadcasted by NPO this February.

woman* life freedom



“Did you know that letting your hair blow in the wind in Iran is a crime?” Visual culture activism in support of the Woman Life Freedom protests

(Sara Emami)

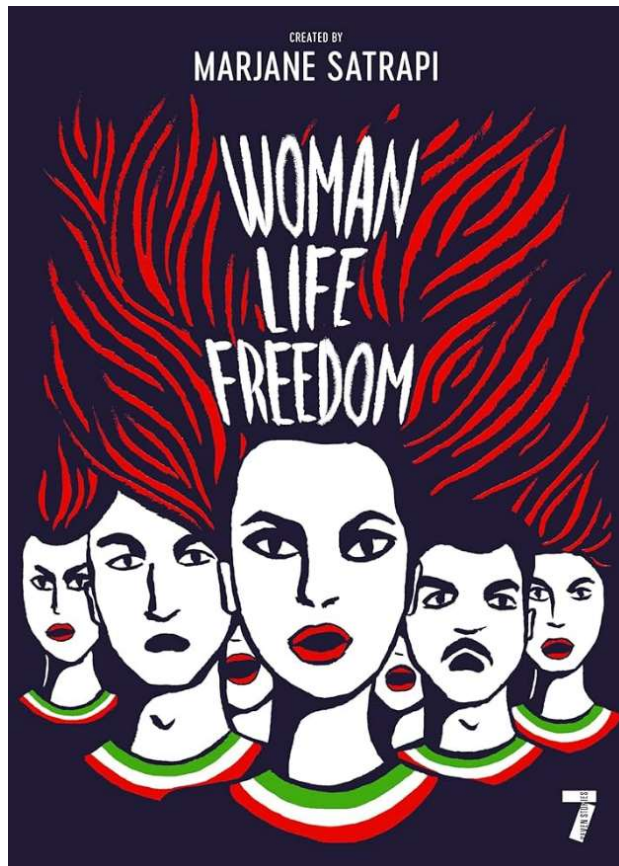
In her presentation, Sara takes you through images she made to raise awareness about the Woman Life Freedom protests in Iran. She will begin with two viral images, targeting non-Iranian audiences, which spread from the Netherlands to protests to countries with Iranian diasporic communities. Next, she will show a series of drawings intended to commemorate victims of the Islamic Republic and to celebrate freedom and equality. This digital visual culture found its way to several awareness campaigns, on clothing in support of the Boroumand foundation based in the United States, in posters for a Dutch film festival at Rialto Cinema in the Netherlands, and on postcards in a campaign run by Amnesty International Switzerland.

Sara Emami studied Industrial Design at Delft University of Technology and is a UX designer working at Philips. In 2022 and 2023, she participated in public conversations in the Netherlands about the Woman Life Freedom protests, based on images she made to raise awareness in the Western world. These images have been used in various protests, displayed in art exhibitions, and published, among others, in *Die Zeit*, *Faire Magazine*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and in the books *Woman Life Freedom: Voices and Art from the Women's Protests in Iran*, edited by Malu Halasa (Saqi 2023), and *Une révolution Iranienne: Femme, Vie, Liberté*, by Odile Burluraux and Hugo Vitrani.

Women Life Freedom

(Marjane Satrapi)

Marjane Satrapi is the author of *Persepolis*, *Embroideries*, *Chicken with Plums*, and several children's books. She co-wrote and co-directed the animated feature film version of *Persepolis*, which was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Animated Feature. Since 2006, she has been a film director and script writer. Among other work, she directed *Voices* and *Radioactive*. She is currently working on her new film, *Paris Paradis*.



An emperor accused of sexual transgression. What is really happening between Bahram Gur and his musician slave girl?

(Christine van Ruymbeke)

The episode of Bahram and his slave musician was already famous in Sassanian times. The narrative is often represented in visual and literary art. This talk will examine two of the oldest literary versions of the tale, those by Ferdowsi and Nezami. The hypothesis that Christine will put forward is that, far from being a love-story under the pen of either poet, the episodes suggest the emperor's practice of crude sexual transgression. We will closely examine the slave girls' thought-provoking challenges and how these are clarified by Nezami in Fetne's character and responses.

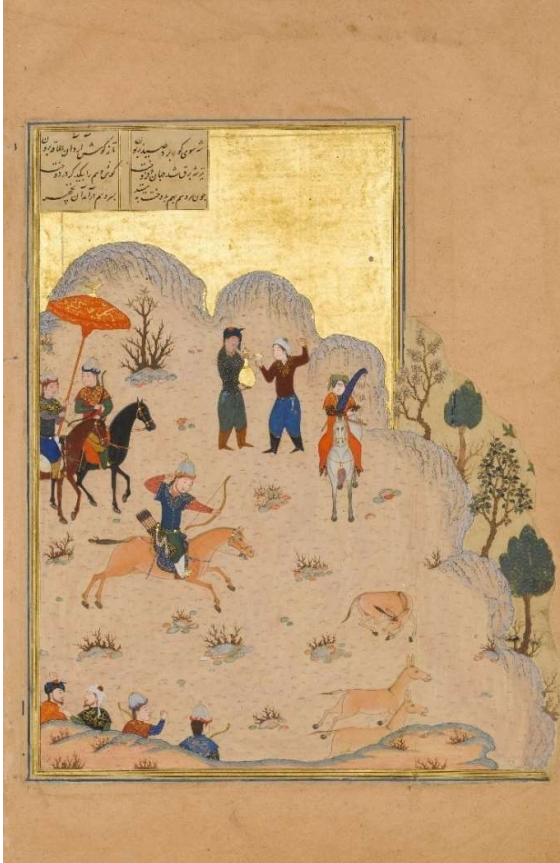
Christine van Ruymbeke is Soudavar Professor of Persian Literature and Culture at the University of Cambridge. She is co-Chair of her Faculty and Head of its Middle Eastern Department. She is a literary critic working on classical (medieval and pre-modern) Persian literature. She has published and co-edited several books and articles on Nezami Ganjavi.

Gendered Conceptions of Cosmic Harmony and Ethics in Nizāmī's Haft Paykar

(Jacomien Prins and Razieh S. Mousavi)

In Nizāmī Ganjavī's (1140–1202) *Haft Paykar* (The Seven Beauties), the spiritual journey of its male hero, Bahram Gūr, through seven planetary spheres inhabited by princesses, covers a symbolic path between black, associated with the hidden majesty of the Divine, and white, associated with purity and unity. The princesses and their pavilions are manifestations of specific planets, colours, days, and types of knowledge. The pavilions are domed, representing the harmonic structure of the heavens. In this paper we investigate how Nizāmī, in line with ancient Greek and Muslim philosophy, used a poetic description of a beautifully ordered cosmos as model of the Good that should serve as a guide to a virtuous life for men and women on earth. We examine how social relations of gender have shaped the knowledge practices and ethics presented in the story and focus on how Nizāmī, in line with the Pythagorean tradition, incorporates a patriarchal gender construct into his narrative. We argue that Nizāmī presents the reader in *Haft Paykar* with a gendered conception of cosmic harmony, in which women symbolize the secret knowledge of the universe, to which only men have the key. This creates a specific kind of communication between men and women, in which beautiful women are used as an instrument for the spiritual growth of men. This case study of gendered knowledge

will not only contribute to a better understanding of how Persian romance has played a major role in disseminating a complex gendered narrative of knowledge, cosmic harmony, and love, but also to more insight into how social relations of gender should play a role in good knowing.



Jacmien Prins is a research fellow at Utrecht University. She has worked extensively on the interaction between music and philosophy in the Renaissance. Her work includes *Echoes of an Invisible World: Marsilio Ficino and Francesco Patrizi on Cosmic Order and Music Theory* (Brill, 2014), *Sing Aloud Harmonious Spheres: Renaissance Conceptions of Cosmic Harmony* (Routledge, 2017), *The Routledge Companion to Music, Mind, and Well-being* (Routledge, 2018), and an edition and translation of Marsilio Ficino's commentary on Plato's *Timaeus* (Harvard University Press, the I Tatti Renaissance Library series (ITRL), forthcoming). She is currently working on a book project titled 'A Well-tempered Life':

Music, Health and Happiness in Renaissance Learning.

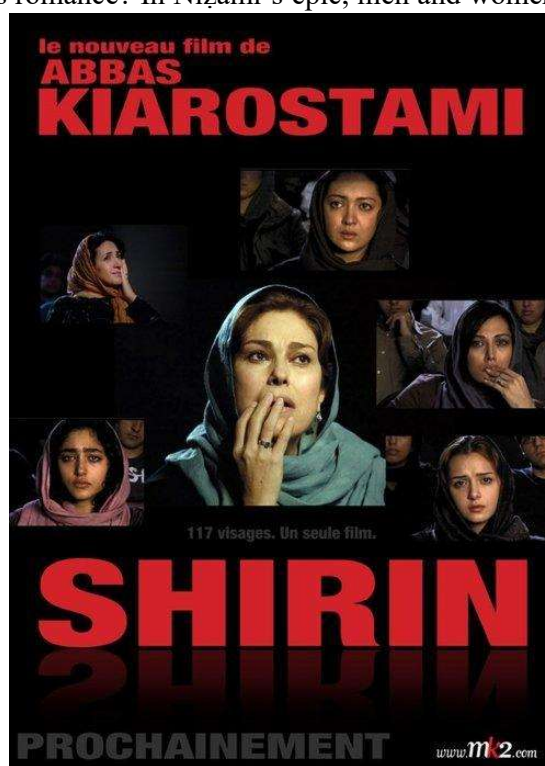
Razieh S. Mousavi is a historian of science working as a postdoctoral fellow at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, affiliated with the ERC Project "Science, Society, and Environmental Change in the First Millennium CE." Additionally, she is a visiting fellow at the Max Planck Research Group "Experience in the Premodern Sciences of Soul and Body ca. 800–1650." Her current focus involves working on the publication of her PhD dissertation, which explores the interdependence of meaning and form in the scientific literature of Islamic intellectual history.

Image: "Bahram Gur's Skill with the Bow", Folio 17v from a Haft Paikar (Seven Portraits) of the Khamsa (Quintet) of Nizami of Ganja. Calligrapher Maulana Azhar, ca. 1430, Herat (Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art, objectnr. 13.228.13.3).

Kiarostami's Shirin and Nizāmī's Khusrow and Shīrīn

(Asghar Seyed-Gohrab)

This paper compares the character of Shirin in Abbas Kiarostami's 2008 film *Shirin* and in Nizāmī's *Khusrow and Shīrīn*. Shirin, more than any other female character in Persian literature, is seen as the paragon of beauty, loyalty, love, passion and perseverance. In *Sīmā-yi du zan* ("The Faces of Two Women"), Saeedi-Sirjani writes, "in the last eight hundred years, no imitator ... has been able to even attain a trace of Nizāmī's virtuosity." Is Kiarostami's *Shirin* the same character as we see in Nizāmī's romance? In Nizāmī's epic, men and women talk to each other freely, they attend courtly banquets, they play polo against each other, and Shirin bathes naked in a river. But the interactions between women and men in Kiarostami's film are limited. Is Nizāmī's courageous Shirin, who travels by night from Armenia to Ctesiphon to meet her beloved Khusrow, imprisoned in modern Iranian society? Shirin commits suicide when she is bereft of love and a decent life: what does this mean for many Iranian women who identify themselves with Shirin? What is Kiarostami's interpretation of Nizāmī's romance and why does Kiarostami highlight only specific elements of Shirin's personality?



Asghar Seyed-Gohrab is Professor of Iranian and Persian Studies at Utrecht University in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies and a member of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW). He has published extensively on Persian literature, mysticism and religion. He has written monographs on subjects ranging from classical Persian poetry to Sufism and the role of mysticism in Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) poetry and how peaceful religious injunctions are used to justify violence. In addition, he has published many articles in international journals, book chapters, blogs, various translations of poetry, and book reviews. He is the general editor of the Iranian Studies Series at Leiden University Press with

currently 31 book titles available. He has authored several books, articles and chapters such as *Martyrdom, Mysticism and Dissent: The Poetry of the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988)* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2021); *Literature of the Early Twentieth Century: From the Constitutional Period to Reza Shah*, (edited volume, London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2015); *Laylī and Majnūn: Love, Madness and Mystic Longing in Nizāmī’s Epic Romance*, (Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2003). He has been the recipient of several national and international prizes. In 2021 he received the prestigious ERC-Advanced Grant for the project *Beyond Sharia: The Role of Sufism in Shaping Islam* (www.beyondsharia.nl).

Spaces of Their Own: The Production of Feminine Ecologies in Contemporary Persian Fiction

(Amir Moosavi)

Since the 1979 Revolution, gender segregation has been a legal reality that officially instituted social conservative practices that were sometimes already in place prior to the Revolution. Post-revolutionary literature, film, and art created by cultural producers unaffiliated with state cultural institutions have often displayed frustration and resistance to such practices, portraying them as fundamentally anti-modern, anti-woman, and part of the Islamic Republic’s systemic structure of patriarchy. However, a contemporary subset of self-proclaimed secular women writers, who represent distinct trends within modern Persian fiction, has taken a different approach by producing novels that imagine non-Islamic spaces of female refuge from the rest of society where only women are allowed to enter. This paper explores this approach by examining three well-known novels written between the late 80s and 2016 by prominent women writers: *Ahl-e gharq* (*The Drowned*, 1990) by Moniro Ravanipour; *Zanan bidun-e mardan* (*Women Without Men*, 1989) by Sharnush Parsipour; and *Haras* (*Pruning*, 2016) by Nasim Marashi. All three of these writers, whose ages span two distinct generations, have written novels where their female protagonists create alternative spaces of societal refuge that critics have called (rightly or wrongly) “magical realist,” and which incorporate local mythology and storytelling techniques. Within these enclosed, distant spaces (a remote village, a walled-off garden, or an isolated island), these novels’ female protagonists shun patriarchal society and create matriarchal spaces defined by their proximity to nature, interactions with plants and non-human animals, and often imbued with a supernatural ambiance. In theorizing these works within the contexts of Persian and world literatures, Amir draws from the Persian

literary history and criticism, and more recent work in animal studies (Anat Pick, Charis Olszok) and eco-criticism (Rob Nixon, Martin Puchner).

Amir Moosavi is an assistant professor in the Department of English at Rutgers University-Newark. He holds a PhD in Middle East and Islamic studies from New York University. His research and teaching interests center around Arabic and Persian literatures, with a focus on modern and contemporary fiction. His publications have appeared in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, *Middle East Critique*, *Alif*, and *Iran Namag*, among other venues. In 2021, he co-edited *Losing Our Minds, Coming to Our Senses: Sensory Readings of Persian Literature and Culture* (Leiden UP, 2021). He is currently completing a book manuscript titled *Dust That Never Settled: Afterlives of the Iran-Iraq War in Arabic and Persian Literatures*. During the spring 2024 semester he is a visiting scholar in the Department of Comparative Literature, University of Turku.

The Psychic-Civic Operability of Safavid Shahr-āshūb(s): Early Modern Literary Interpretations of Gendered Agency

(Mahroo Moosavi)

Shahr-āshūb is a genre of Persian poetry (with its oldest known examples - with the title of shahr-āshūb – composed by Mas‘ūd-i Sa‘d-i Salmān (d. 1121-22 AD)) in which the poet either describes several craftsmen (and crafts) of a city mainly through putting them at the position of a graceful beloved, or composes poems in the madḥ or zam of a city and its inhabitants. Originally meaning a person who disturbs the order of a city with his/her beauty, the concept of shahr-āshūb draws parallels between a person and a poem through an act of personification of text. In this mechanism, text turns from a literary production into an active agent, from an object to a subject with gendered – either masculine or feminine – qualities. While this gendered literary being disturbs and violates the civic order through questioning and critiquing the norms, simultaneously it puts itself in a state of nuanced fragility – as is recorded in a few historical accounts where the people of cities to which the seemingly insulting shahr-āshūb(s) were addressed, arrested, offended, physically tortured, or even killed the poet.

By looking at the history of the shahr-āshūb and bringing several instances, this paper focuses on the complexities of such literary-psychological dynamism created between the vulnerable yet vicious poet/gendered shahr-āshūb and the city and its inhabitants and suggests that the surge in composing shahr-āshūb(s) during the Safavid period (1501-1722) may be interpreted

as a literary representation of new forms of sexual fluidity in the Iranian civic society. These new forms may constitute firstly and on the surface layer, the manners by which the genre of Safavid shahr-āshūb commits to document the corporeality of the society through referring to and describing the funūn, ṣanāyi‘, and ḥiraf; and secondly and more importantly, on its deeper layers, the gendered agencies and modes of operability of the concept of shahr-āshūb in de and re shaping of the Safavids’ less visible structures of societal-political life.

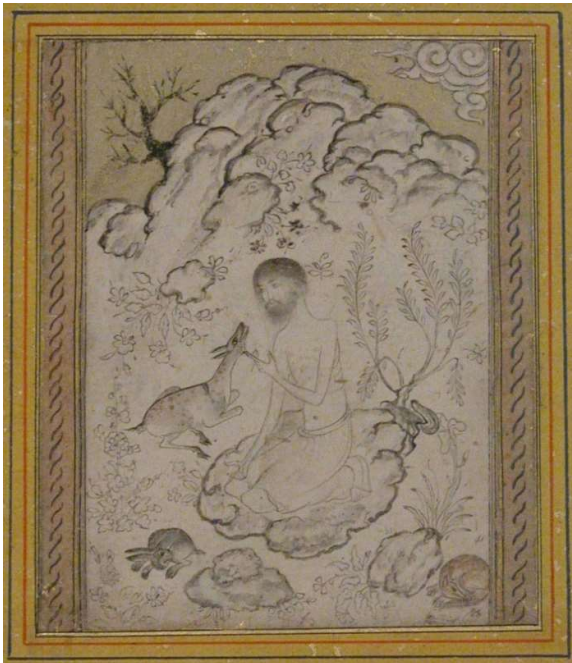
Mahroo Moosavi is a Max-Planck Institute Postdoctoral Fellow at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, in collaboration with the Museum of Islamic Art at the Pergamon Museum Berlin. An historian of early modern Iran, she is specialised in the intersections of art and literature of the 16th and 17th centuries Iran and the broader Persianate world. She is particularly interested in the psychic-thematic and architectonic connotations and micro-politics of the textually inscribed objects and written artefacts, such as the manuscripts, and the epigraphic programme of public buildings of the major Safavid (1501-1722) cities like Isfahan. Her research is also concerned with new readings of the arts of Islam and Iran through blurring the boundaries between the visual and textual cultures, such as in the cases of the illustrated manuscripts of the Safavids.

From 2021 to 2023, she has held post-doctoral fellowships and visiting lectureships at the University of Oxford, including the Bahari Fellowship in the Persian Arts of the Book at the Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, the Nizami Ganjavi Centre Fellowship, Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Oxford, and Oliver Smithies Lectureship at Balliol College, University of Oxford. Her research has been supported by the British Academy, the British Institute of Persian Studies, University of Oxford, the Warburg Institute, School of Advanced Study, University of London amongst others. Her most recent publication is “Sleeping under the Hazardous Dome of the Sky: An Intertextual Study of Representation of Corporeality in Seventeenth Century Poetry and Architecture of Safavid Isfahan,” in *Land Air Sea - Studies on Art, Art History, and Intellectual History*, Brill, 2023.

A Pact Between Conflicting Codes: Javānmardī in Nezāmī's Layli and Majnun

(Allison Kanner-Botan)

Although javānmardī can literally be translated as “young manliness,” this paper traces the rich semantic field of the term in order to understand its deployment in Nezāmī's (d. 1209) *Layli and Majnun*. Javānmardī's mystical and courtly connotations provide the historical backdrop for understanding its deployment in a key scene in the text, namely, the meeting point between the two male protagonists Majnun and Nawfal who agree to wage battle together. Allison argues that mutual recognition between Majnun and Nawfal occurs due to their ability to see one another as a javānmard, which entails the performance of an ennobling masculinity, however, Majnun's idea of nobility hinges upon loyalty to his beloved whereas Nawfal's resides in social codes of honor. This temporary recognition and its ultimate demise, she maintains, points to how the text introduces mystical masculinity through the character of Majnun as an alternative to romantic chivalry, and how it simultaneously critiques mystical masculinity as anti-social.



Allison will begin with historical genealogies of the concept of javānmardī in Sufism and medieval Islamic social life, incorporating insights from secondary literature from Lloyd Rigdeon, Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, and Henry Corbin alongside a broad historical overview of the transition from disparate Arabic anecdotes into a Persian romantic epic of the legend of Layli (or Layla) and Majnun. She then turns to the specific episode in question and point towards how the literary form of Nezāmī's text as well as its contextual references bring forth Majnun and Nawfal's mutual recognition through being javānmard. Finally, she zooms out from this specific episode to reflect on how the undermining of Majnun's mystical masculinity suggests that Nezāmī's text need not be read as a holistically Sufi work, but rather as a work that brings conflicting value systems into dialogic tension in order to incite critical thought in the reader.

Allison Kanner-Botan is a literary scholar of premodern Islamic societies, with an emphasis on the relationship between aesthetics and social critique. Her interdisciplinary research extends across the fields of Arabic and Persianate literatures, gender and sexuality studies, Islamic thought, comparative literary theory, translation theory, as well as disability studies and medical humanities. Her current book project, *Maddening Love: Narrating Desire in Premodern Islam*, explores the influence of medical ideas about love on premodern Arabic, Persian, and Turkish renditions of the most famous love-story of the Islamic world, the story of Layla and the madman-poet Majnun. Challenging the fact that humanistic inquiry theorizes desire from modern, Eurocentric canons, the study will attend to premodern Islamic literature as a site for reconsidering the relationship between desire and ethics. Currently, she is a Chancellor's Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Colorado Boulder; from July 2024, she will be an Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of California, Los Angeles. She completed her PhD at the University of Chicago in Spring 2023.

Femininity and Masculinity: The Character of Vis in Gorgāni's Vis-o-Rāmin

(Mira de Boose)

In a paper she wrote during her Master in Iranian Studies at the Sorbonne Nouvelle, Myra analyzed the excerpt "Rāmin sees Vis and falls in love with her" from Fakhraddin Gorgāni's 11th century romance *Vis-o-Rāmin*. *Vis-o-Rāmin*, believed to have Parthian/Zoroastrian origins, is considered one of the greatest Persian romances in verse. While investigating the functioning of worldly love and the role of the senses, Myra came to regard Vis as an extraordinary character within the tradition of classical Persian poetry. Therefore, she proposed to write a paper examining the ways in which Gorgāni shapes this female character and how this relates to the characterization of Rāmin within the context of the International Conference on Femininity and Masculinity. How does Gorgāni, who lived in an Islamic society, articulate the notion of gender and the communication of the genders in a romance with pre-Islamic origins?

In the introduction to his magnificent English translation, Dick Davis describes *Vis-o-Rāmin* as a portrait of a woman who follows her heart and commits adultery without the outcome of the story punishing her decisions. Interestingly, the poem is dedicated to portraying the inner world of a female character who is rebelling against the patriarchal expectations of how she should lead her life. From the very beginning of the poem, a free spirit and a multi-faceted

personality are attributed to Vis, which makes her character outstanding in the tradition of Persian literature. By closely analyzing one or two excerpts expressing Vis' inner life, willpower and sexuality, Myra aims to investigate how Gorgāni challenged the patriarchal gender norms and the construct of femininity.

Mira de Boose was born in 1995 in Ghent, Belgium. Passionate about poetry, language and art, she is active in audiovisual art and literature and in academia as a young scholar. She holds a Master's degree in Audiovisual Arts from the School of Arts in Ghent, which she obtained in 2018. She graduated with the short documentary "I am spring, you are earth", a journey into Persian language and poetry guided by the words of modern poet Forough Farrokhzad. In 2021, she completed her Bachelor's degree in Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Leiden, where she studied Persian language and culture with a minor in Turkish language. Her Bachelor's thesis, written under the supervision of Professor Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, was titled Saadi's Vision on Love: An Analysis of the Notion of Love in the Bustan (the Orchard). Recently, in October 2023, she completed her Master's degree in Iranian Studies Summa Cum Laude at the Sorbonne Nouvelle. Her master's thesis, titled I Am Still Travelling: The Role Of Travel In Sohrāb Sepehri's Poetics and supervised by professors Justine Landau and Eve Feuillebois, explored the role of travel in the poetic and visual oeuvre of Sohrāb Sepehri. She translated and analysed Sepehri's Japanese travelogues as collected in the book *Hanuz dar safaram*. In the coming year, she plans to create a documentary film from her thesis, continue working on translations of Persian poetry, and prepare a doctoral proposal.

Renegotiating Gender and Sex in Persian Literature: Sa'di Shirazi, Jahan Malek Khatun and Forugh Farrokhzad

(Domenico Ingenito)

Reading Persian poetry through the lens of gender, sex and desire has become an endeavor of vital importance in the field of Iranian Studies. No longer relegated to the periphery of post-modern socio-literary studies, gender critique of medieval and modern Persian literature reveals unexpected connections between the forms and meanings of texts and their connection with the bodies and spaces in which poetry was composed, circulated and received. Emphasis on gender highlights how the entire history of Persian literature is characterized by fluid discourses that frame desire as a human experience at the intersection between imaginary

creations and concrete historical and biographical experiences, socio-religious norms and subversive compulsions, as well as the visible and the unseen.

This talk will show how three major authors of medieval and modern Iran, Sa‘di Shirazi, Jahan Malek Khatun and Forugh Farrokhzad, can be studied comparatively from the perspective of gender fluidity, literary innovation, and symbolic constructions of desire that erode the boundaries between textual and material culture. In particular, we will see how Sa‘di’s sacred homoeroticism and philosophical Sufism, expressed both in his serious and obscene production, inspired princess-poet Jahan’s ambiguously homonormative approach to lyric poetry. Moreover, in-depth analyses of these two medieval poets’ literary manipulation of gender will help us conceive of modernist author Forugh Farrokhzad’s poetic production as a non-normative discourse on heterosexual desire.

Domenico Ingenito is Associate Professor of Iranian Studies and Persian Literature at the University of California, Los Angeles, Bahari Fellow in the Persian Arts of the Book (Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford) and former director of the UCLA Program on Central Asia (2016-2021). His research interests centre on ancient and mediaeval Iran, Persian poetry, visual culture of Iran and Central Asia, gender and translations studies, and premodern manuscript culture. His most recent books are *Beholding Beauty: Sa‘di of Shiraz and the Aesthetics of Desire in Medieval Persian Poetry* (Brill, 2020, reviews appeared in *Iranian Studies*, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, *Middle Eastern Literatures*, *Oxford Journal of Islamic Studies*) and a critical edition and Italian translation of Forugh Farrokhzad’s collected poems (*Io parlo dai confini della notte. Forugh Farrokhzad: tutte le poesie*, Bompiani, 2023, 800 pp.). His current research projects focus on kingship and desire in Ghaznavid praise poetry and the relationship between artistic creativity and the visual arts in the narrative poems (*Khamsa*) of Nizami Ganjavi. Professor Ingenito co-leads the UCLA Afghan Scholars at Risk program, which aims to bring to campus scholars and writers who face repression in Afghanistan.



The research program of *Beyond Sharia: The Role of Sufism in Shaping Islam* has been made possible thanks to the Advanced Grant awarded to Professor Asghar Seyed-Gohrab by the European Research Council (ERC).