

The Shaping of Persian Art

The Shaping of Persian Art:
Collections and Interpretations of the Art
of Islamic Iran and Central Asia

Edited by

Yuka Kadoi and Iván Szántó

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P U B L I S H I N G

The Shaping of Persian Art:
Collections and Interpretations of the Art of Islamic Iran and Central Asia,
Edited by Yuka Kadoi and Iván Szántó

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

An idea for this volume initially developed at the planning stage of a panel for the 11th Conference of the European Society for Central Asian Studies (ESCAS) in the autumn of 2009. Hosted by the Central European University in Budapest, the conference offered an invaluable opportunity for us to rethink European historical ties with Asian civilisations, such as the migration of the Magyars and other nomadic people from the Eurasian steppes to Central Europe, as well as the invasions of the Mongols and the Ottoman Turks. This unique opportunity encouraged us to call for our colleagues to conduct a collaborative project, and our enthusiasm turned into a collection of essays dealing with the history of Asian art collections and studies from the perspective of Persia—a common research interest of the editors and the contributors to the current volume.

The editors wish to thank all those who have contributed their time and knowledge to the completion of this volume. A variety of the papers in this volume portrays the increased diversification of this discipline. Our sincere thanks go to Joachim Gierlichs and Friederike Voigt for their help and encouragement since their participation in the ESCAS session. In addition to Tatjana Kardos who made a collaborative endeavour with Iván Szántó to reveal a hitherto unknown aspect of Persian art collections in Budapest, we are most grateful to Alice Bombardier, Sabina Dvořáková, Mircea Dunca, Magdalena Ginter-Frolow, Barbara Karl and Eva-Maria Troelenberg who took part in the volume project with their insightful essays. A contribution from Tajikistan by Larisa Dodkhudoeva, Rustam Mukimov and Katherine Hughes gives an additional “Persian” flavour, an element which is most desirable for the depth of discussion in the volume. Finally, the editors are very fortunate to have such wonderful contributors who are most supportive and cooperative.

It is hoped that this publication would be a stimulus to break a traditional view towards the cultural border.

The Editors

NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION AND TERMINOLOGY

For the sake of simplicity, the use of diacritical marks for Arabic, Persian and Turkish words or names are kept to a minimum. Vowels are transcribed according to the standard Romanisation of Arabic, with the exception of the Persian silent “h,” which is written out as a terminal “e.” Turkish words follow the modern Turkish alphabet, except in classical contexts where they are transcribed as mentioned above. For modern Tajik, the standard transliteration of Tajik was chosen but sometimes the Persian form was also provided. To avoid confusion, the names of certain modern Iranian persons occur both in standard transcription and in the commonly used English form.

Throughout the volume, the term “Persia” is extensively used, since the current volume is much concerned with the time before 1935, when the country name “Iran” was internationally recognised. The term “Oriental” is used in some articles, if it is linked to a 19th- and 20th-century geographical notion towards the non-western world, covering not only the Islamic Middle East and North Africa but also Asia and Africa in general.

Unless necessary, Hijri (Islamic lunar) dates are not given. Some biographical dates of individuals are not given, due to lack of information at the time of editing the volume.

ABBREVIATIONS

- BWG L. Binyon, J. V. S. Wilkinson and B. Gray, *Persian Miniature Painting: Including A Critical and Descriptive Catalogue of the Miniatures Exhibited at Burlington House, January – March, 1931*, London, 1933.
- EIr *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, New York, 1982-.
- SPA A. U. Pope and P. Ackerman (eds.), *A Survey of Persian Art from Prehistoric Times to the Present*, London, 1938-9.

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INTRODUCTION

WHY PERSIAN ART NEEDS TO BE STUDIED AND COLLECTED

WHY PERSIAN ART NEEDS TO BE STUDIED AND COLLECTED

YUKA KADOI AND IVÁN SZÁNTÓ

The notion of “Persia” is a key to understanding of what we now widely conceive as the Islamic Iranian art style but equally as the Central Asian art style of the Islamic period, evoking, for instance, the famous *maydan* in Isfahan or quadrangular formal gardens in Shiraz, as well as the blue tiles on a four-*ivan* building in Samarqand or knotted pile medallion carpets from Herat. “Persian art,” in the first place, had developed in a succession of Persian empires, first under the Achaemenid kings, later under their Arsacid, Sasanian and Muslim descendants. The core lands of these empires changed from time to time, but as the Persian administration expanded, this generated a broad Persianisation that affected vast swathes of Central Asia as well as the art history of even farther regions.¹ A lasting visual bond between Persia and the region of Transoxiana became self-evident after the integration of this region into the greater Islamic world under the ‘Abbasids, Samanids, Ilkhanids, Timurids and their successors. In the words of Robert Byron (1905–1941): “Timur, in founding an empire [...], had delivered Oxiana from the nomads and brought the Turks of Central Asia within the orbit of Persian civilisation.”² Such sweeping statements are, however, bound to be challenged.

While the impact of the Persian style is undeniably reflected in most aspects of the art and architecture of Islamic Central Asia, this Perso-Central Asian connection was chiefly formed and articulated by the Euro-American movement of collecting and interpreting the art and material culture of the Persian Islamic world during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This exerted an enormous impact on the formation of scholarship and connoisseurship in Persian art, for instance with an attempt to define the characteristics of how the Islamic art of modern-day

¹ For the mechanisms of this process in pre-Islamic times, see Ball, 2010; Boardman 2000.

² Byron 1937/1982, 88.

Iran and Central Asia should be viewed and displayed at museums and how these subjects should be researched in academia. This important historical fact, which has attracted scholarly interest only in recent years, should be treated as a serious subject of research, accepting that the abstract image of Persian art was not a pure creation of Persian civilisation but can be the manifestation of particular historical times and charismatic individuals. Attention should therefore be given to various factors that resulted in the shaping of “Persian” imagery across the globe, not only in terms of national ideologies, but also within the context of several protagonists, such as scholars, collectors and dealers, as well as of objects themselves.

Besides the on-going debate as to whether or not the cultural term “Persia” should be replaced by the more politically-oriented term “Iran,” the fundamental question arises: can “Persian” art be defined after all? Is it related to a particular style or a peculiar visual language, or, rather, does it refer to the unity of artistic traditions within a given geographic, ethnic or linguistic area at a limited time? Why shall we still opt for the enduring term “Persia”—rather than Iran, the names of several independent “istans,” generically the Middle East, Islam or West Asia—when it comes to the art, architecture and material culture of modern-day Iran and Central Asia after the Arab conquest in the 7th century? And can we still distinguish between “Persian” and “Islamic” after the conquest? If “Persian art” should and must only be interpreted as an abstract idea rather than a well-defined unity, was the term solid enough through its constant use in past scholarship? And, above all, can we still employ it safely?³

There is no shortage of self-assured statements and attempts to classify artistic and architectural forms to different social or ethnic groups, such as the Persians, the Turks or the Arabs, as well as to propose certain hierarchical orders between them.⁴ Yet “Persian art”—like most collective terms in the history of art—has always been fluid, greatly depending on who, where, when and on what purpose brought it into play. Judging by the number of books and articles about “Persian art,” it is intriguing to see that, while consensus did never exist about the items that could be packed together in this baggage, the existence of the baggage has been accepted by nearly every scholar. For some, a Coptic textile may have been Sasanian, hence Persian; others grouped Mughal paintings into several “Indo-Persian” schools with the emphasis on the Persian pedigree. For yet others, the palace of Mshatta in modern-day Jordan *was* Persian, but some

³ For the history of the term “Iran,” see Gnoli 1989.

⁴ The methodological consequences of ill-defined terminological premises are demonstrated by Grabar 2010.

could regard the Mausoleum of Isma‘il Samani in modern-day Uzbekistan *only* as Tajik.

The present volume does not make judgments and does not come forward with a new solution: neither does it have any say in the art-historical development of Persian art before or after the Muslim conquest. Instead, it reconsiders the ideas of those who contributed to the shaping of “Persian art” of the Islamic period.

Notes on Historiography—Persian, Iranian or Islamic?

To begin with, let us historiographically assess the work of Marcel Dieulafoy (1844–1920), the author of one of the earliest general surveys of ancient Persian art, entitled *L’Art antique de la Perse* (1884–9).⁵ In a lesser-known later book by Dieulafoy, *Art in Spain and Portugal* (1913), he suggested that most of the arts of mediaeval Iberia were derived from Islamic, and ultimately Sasanian, Persia. The first paragraph is worth quoting in its entirety:

“It may seem strange that the art history of Spain and Portugal should begin on Iranian ground, at the time of the Sassanids, and that the study of the primitive mosques should serve as a preface to that of the western churches. I hope, however, to show in the course of the first three chapters that Persia was not only the source of inspiration of Musulman architecture, and of the so-called Mudejar architecture of Spain, but that she played an important and well-defined part in the elaboration of those religious themes which found their way into the Asturias, Castille, and Catalonia after the expulsion of the invaders, and were acclimatised in France at a later period by the Benedictines.”⁶

A chain of Italian scholars from Michele Amari (1806–1889) through Ugo Monneret de Villard (1881–1954) and Geza de Francovich (1902–1996) to Giovanni D’Erme (1935–2011) projected a similar genealogical link among mediaeval Italy, Fatimid Egypt and pre-Islamic Persia. Amari, for instance, suggested a massive Persian immigration in Sicily during its Muslim conquest and offered a series of toponymy that he believed to reflect Khurasanian or Transoxanian connections.⁷ Monneret not only drew comparisons between early mediaeval Italian and Persian art, but he was also aware of Persian artistic presence in ancient India.⁸ Francovich

⁵ Dieulafoy 1884-9.

⁶ Dieulafoy 1913, 1.

⁷ Amari 1858, vol. 2, 31-35.

⁸ Monneret 1938; for an assessment of Monneret, see Contadini 2000.

found an underlying Persian core in the representation of kingship in mediaeval European art,⁹ while D’Erme “was vividly struck by the ‘Persian aura’ which effused from” the Cappella Palatina in Palermo.¹⁰

Such bold assertions may have stemmed from whimsical thoughts of Italian scholars of various times.¹¹ Yet they responded, to a certain degree, to the 19th-century trend in Indo-European linguistics and anthropology that greatly stimulated the growing European discourse on the origins of western art, including the “Orient oder Rom” debate that had provocatively been triggered off by Josef Strzygowski (1862–1941) in Vienna in 1901.¹² Despite an unclear definition of its role in the shaping of western art, Persia continued to exude its “aura,” and it was this very aura which was perceived and translated into an abstract idea of “Persian art” in the context of the “Orient oder Rom” debate. The term “Persian art” eventually came to be used, though in its most general sense, in mediaeval contexts as a distant backdrop for a remote past, whereas the more recent, let alone contemporary, artistic contacts between Europe and Persia were rarely touched upon before World War II.¹³

⁹ Francovich 1964.

¹⁰ D’Erme 2004, 401; see also D’Erme 1995.

¹¹ A similar, “Perso-Spanish” thesis was suggested by the Scotsman Robert Murdoch Smith (1835–1900), the director of the Persian telegraph company in Tehran who acted as an agent to acquired Persian objects for the South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert Museum) in London in 1873–85. In his *Persian Art* (London, 1876), a guidebook which was published on the occasion of the exhibition of Persian art in 1876, he states that “Persia is in all probability the country from which the Arabs derived the arts afterwards developed by them in Spain and elsewhere [...] it is far from improbable that even the Alhambra itself was chiefly the work of Persians, who stood to the Arabs in much the same relation that the Greeks did to the Romans” (Smith 1876, 3–4).

¹² His controversial book was entitled *Orient oder Rom: Beiträge zur Geschichte der spätantiken und frühchristlichen Kunst* (Orient or Rome: Contributions to the History of Late Antique and Early Christian Art). In conjunction with the 150th anniversary of the birth of Strzygowski, there were several events related to his career in the year of 2012, most notably a conference in Vienna on 12 October, organised by the Gesellschaft für vergleichende Kunstforschung (Society for Comparative Studies in Art; for the conference programme, see <http://www.vergleichende.at>, accessed 21 March 2013).

¹³ There were exceptions; see, for instance, Friedrich Sarre (1865–1945)’s early article about Islamic elements in the art of Rembrandt (“Rembrandts Zeichnungen nach Indisch-Islamisch Miniaturen”, *Jahrbuch der königlich-preussischen Kunstsammlungen*, 25 [1904], 143–58). For Sarre’s life and career, see Gierlichs’s article in the present volume.

While Europe was not particularly receptive to the art and culture of modern Persia during the 19th and early 20th centuries, the latter, on the other hand, earnestly studied, reciprocated and exploited the on-going European discourse about the quasi-legendary brilliance of Persian art, especially during the last years of the Qajar dynasty and under the energetic rulership of Riza Shah Pahlavi (r. 1925–41).¹⁴ It laid claim to every bit of the Persian greatness that had been so much extolled by western scholars. Pahlavi Persia (or Iran after 1935) invited leading scholars and sponsored or supported the great international projects of the 1930s relating to the subject: these included archaeological expeditions, congresses, loan exhibitions, and—most lasting of all—the publication of *A Survey of Persian Art* (1938–9), a multi-volume corpus which was edited by Arthur Upham Pope (1881–1969) and Phyllis Ackerman (1893–1977).¹⁵ Without doubt, the leading western scholars to take up residence in Persia were the self-made entrepreneur Pope from America,¹⁶ the polymath Ernst Herzfeld (1879–1948) from Germany¹⁷ and the architect and Franco-Persian cultural attaché André Godard (1881–1965) from France.¹⁸ They gave support to the official renaming of the country from Persia to Iran, a move which implied that the country was home to all Iranians—Kurds, Lors, Balochi and even Turkic-speaking people—not just the Persians. However, it can be argued that this reversal of the discourse may have ultimately sealed the fate of “Persian art.” Tied to a modern, secular state, “Persian art” was detached from its earlier aura of timelessness, thus losing most of its universal claims.

Although modern Iran attempted to further promote the western-fabricated elements of its own mystique, the new nationalist standpoint exerted a counteractive effect. Ultimately “Persian art” failed to challenge the success of the—likewise highly contestable—term “Islamic art.” Today, Persian art forms part of Islamic collections and museums all over the world, but no “Museum of Persian Art” has ever been established.¹⁹ Yet

¹⁴ See Grigor 2007.

¹⁵ SPA.

¹⁶ For the life and career of Pope, see Gluck and Siver (eds.) 1996; Kadoi (ed.) forthcoming.

¹⁷ For Herzfeld in Persia, see Hauser, von Gall, Stronach and Skjaervo 2003 and recently Jenkins 2012.

¹⁸ For Godard in Persia, see Gran-Aymerich and Marefat 2001, and Bombardier’s article in the present volume.

¹⁹ While there is no museum in Iran with this name, there are several collections in the country aiming to present exclusively Persian art. Chief among these is the National Museum of Iran (formerly Museum of Ancient Iran, *Muze-ye Iran-e*

Dieulafoy's Spanish hypothesis shows that the complete separation of the Cordovan and Bukharan artistic traditions before 750 AD and the forced amalgamation of these two extremes in the mould of Islam after 750, as postulated by the late 20th-century doyen of Islamic art studies Oleg Grabar (1929–2011), would look rather differently using a Persian mould.²⁰

The shift from “Persian” to “Islamic” happened in parallel with the establishment of the Arab states in former Ottoman territories after World War I and the invention or reassertion of their local, modernist-national traditions. While attempts were made to recategorise the arts according to major ethnic groups in the Middle East based on the 19th-century concept—namely Turkish, Arab and Persian—or according to the religious group by adopting the adjectives such as Muhammadan or Muslim, a new taxonomical category—Islam—was introduced by western art historians in the inter-war period so as to give Islamic art a false sense of one secular, cultural unit.²¹ The application of the secularised, collective term “Islamic” for generically describing the arts of later Persia undermined the role of Persia, while post-Ottoman pan-Arab nationalism welcomed the emphasis on Islam, whether religiously or culturally, as an original Arab contribution to global civilisation. Such shifts rarely occur without conflicts, as shown, for instance, by the continuing disagreement over the name of the Persian Gulf.²² Similar processes have been taking place in many more areas over the wider region from the Caucasus to Afghanistan.

During the height of the “Orient oder Rom” debate but geographically far from the centre of the debate, the Russian Yakov Ivanovich Smirnov (1869–1918) realised that a large number, perhaps the majority, of the splendid metalwork hoards from the Russian steppe and Siberia, which had been previously considered as Persian, was in fact “Iranian.”²³ The chapters of the art of long-forgotten Iranian peoples, such as the Sogdians,

Bastan), established in Tehran in 1937 by André Godard. As its original name implies, its initial emphasis fell on the pre-Islamic period, yet the Perso-Islamic material also underwent such a rapid growth that the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran was induced to devolve it upon a separate Museum of the Islamic Period in 1994.

²⁰ Grabar 1973, 4–15.

²¹ The process of secularisation in Islamic art is lengthily discussed in Shaw's study of Islamic art collections in the Ottoman Imperial Museum (see Shaw 2000, 59).

²² It is in this context interesting to note that the Museum of the Persian Gulf was founded in the largest Iranian port city Bandar 'Abbas in 2008, when the opposite coast witnessed the opening of the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha in Qatar.

²³ Smirnov 1909.

the Khwarizmians and the Bactrians, thus began to emerge as the essential narratives of a wider, more variegated Iranian civilisation. This again paralleled important political changes which were to unfold in Central Asia, a Turkic-dominated land, also called “Turan” or “Turkestan.” Within a few decades, new states appeared on this part of the Persian cultural domain, such as the Uzbek, Tajik, Turkmen and Azerbaijan Soviet republics, completing the fragmentation of Persian art.²⁴

Each fiercely claimed to be heir to the same patrimony, often in an exclusionist manner, and was eager to establish a historical link to great mediaeval dynasties, such as the Samanids for Tajikistan and the Timurids for Uzbekistan. To fashion local culture more authentically national, as well as to erase the history of the communist past after the 1990s, some of the best-preserved monuments in the region that had been researched by leading Soviet scholars in the 1960s-70s were, soon after the independence, extensively restored or in some cases completely remodelled as buildings with more recognisably “Persian”-style decoration.²⁵ At the same time, the Turkic Uzbeks regard themselves as heirs *par excellence* to the Turanians, the legendary foes of the Iranians, and model their monuments on this standpoint. Official Uzbek historiography stresses the independence of classical Uzbek culture from Persia, even if western observers, like Robert Byron, quoted above, look at local art as Persianate.²⁶ Furthermore, Uzbek nationalism refuses to accept the large Persian-speaking Tajik community as being Tajik, maintaining instead that every citizen of the country represent the Turkic Uzbek nation. Neighbouring Tajikistan, conversely, emphasises its Iranian identity as opposed to the “Turanian” Uzbeks.²⁷ Fellow Iranian Afghans discovered the pre-Islamic Kushan and Islamic

²⁴ Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan can be excluded in the discussion of neo-Persianisation in the former Soviet Central Asia. The former is ethnically diverse, consisting not only of the Turkic Kazakhs but also of many ethnic groups as a result of mass deportations from other Soviet states under Joseph Stalin. The latter is more culturally associated with the lands formally called East Turkestan, historically known as the lands of the Uyghurs or the Western Regions (*Xiyu*) in China.

²⁵ The process of re-Persianising Islamic monuments already occurred in Central Asia during the 19th century (see Rogers 2006).

²⁶ For further discussion on Uzbek national ideology, see March 2002. Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan follow a similar path, although in the absence of a significant Persian-speaking population conflicts are less pronounced there than in Uzbekistan.

²⁷ See the essay on Tajik art in the present volume.

Ghorid (or Ghurid) dynasties as precursors in their national history.²⁸ Turkmenistan may be regarded as an exception: this Turkic nation which has emerged from a nomad pastoralist society, finds its ancient embodiment in the Iranian-speaking Parthians who also appeared in history as nomads.²⁹

Ultimately, many Central Asian monuments lost their original elements, compared with the time when Ernst Cohn-Wiener (1882–1941) made a pioneering study of the still-untouched Islamic monuments of Central Asia.³⁰ In the Caucasus, the newly created Turkic state of Azerbaijan similarly dissociated itself from the modern state of Iran, downplaying the links with Persian culture and regarding itself as a victim of Persian expansionism, while the outwardly Persianate local monuments have been regarded as evidence for an independent Turko-Azeri genius. Significantly, however, the Christian Armenians and Georgians, with their artistic heritage scattered over Iran and Turkey, display a much more relaxed attitude towards the question. As the most important middlemen between various religious and ethnic groups in the region since ancient times, many aspects of their art have become compatible with both Persianate and nationalist interpretations.

In this regard, it is instructive to contemplate the fate of Persian art by looking at two of its most powerful modern manifestations. The symbolic mausoleum of the first great New Persian poet, Abu ‘Abdallah Ja‘far Rudaki (858–c. 941) in Panjrud, Tajikistan (1958), and that of the two American scholars of Persian art Arthur Upham Pope and Phyllis Ackerman in Isfahan (completed in 1977), were both modelled on the so-called Samanid Mausoleum in Bukhara in modern-day Uzbekistan, the earliest major Persian monument from the Islamic period (c. 914–43).³¹

²⁸ Before the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1979, the pre-Islamic Iranian Kushan dynasty (c. 1st–4th centuries AD) played a central role in the formation of modern Afghan cultural identity (see Nayksi 1982). This orientation was eclipsed by subsequent decades of war, and in recent years the Muslim Iranian Ghorid dynasty (12th–13th centuries) appears to take over as Afghanistan’s “national” dynasty, as expressed, for instance, at an international seminar, entitled *The Ghorid Empire and its Role in the History, Civilisation and Culture of Afghanistan and the Region*, held in Kabul in 2011. While the papers have not yet been published, the organising foundation (Ghuri Jahandaran Cultural Foundation) maintains a website which offers information about this event and other conferences (<http://www.jameghor.com>, accessed 30 October, 2012).

²⁹ See, for instance, Asyrov (ed.) 2007.

³⁰ Cohn-Wiener 1930.

³¹ For the millicentennial celebrations of Rudaki in Tajikistan, see Mirzoev 1968; for the Pope-Ackerman mausoleum, see Grigor 2009, 175–200. Pope’s contributions to the development of Persian art studies and collections will be referred to in

But the two buildings represent diametrically opposing aims: whereas the Rudaki Mausoleum becomes fixed firmly in the Tajik national canon, the other building expresses the universalism of Persian art, as envisioned by Pope and Ackerman.

In order to prevent further fragmentation of the Iranian world, a few international scholars, like Richard Nelson Frye (b. 1920), have been working hard to uphold the idea of “Greater Iran” not only in the academic sphere but also among the people of the successor states.³² Representing a slightly different approach, the Association for the Study of Persianate Societies (ASPS) was inaugurated in 2002 in Tajikistan to investigate the culture of the Persian-speaking societies and the wider Iranian world.³³ In addition, the past years have seen the publication of a number of pioneering studies which explored the role of the Persian language, including translations and inscriptions, in Islamic art history. For example, a recent survey by Bernard O’Kane showed that Persian epigraphy is surprisingly widespread in Islamic art, appearing between Europe and Bengal as the second-most popular language in inscriptions after Arabic.³⁴

The Birth of “Persian Islamic” Art and Western Art History

As widely argued elsewhere in a recent reassessment of art history in the non-western world, Islamic art history was essentially developed as a branch of western art history from the 19th to the 20th century,³⁵ and the major discourse of the double-adjective “Persian Islamic,” or the more hybrid term “Perso-Islamic,” art was thus also conducted chiefly by Euro-American scholars. During the formative period of its scholarship, the primary concerns for Persian art among western scholars were given to architecture and “miniature” painting of the great mediaeval dynasties of the Saljuqs, Ilkhanids, Timurids and Safavids. Sculpture, which traditionally ranks highly in western art history, lost its significance after the Muslim

Kadoi’s article in the present volume. It should be noted that the Rudaki Mausoleum has been most recently replaced by a larger structure which displays Timurid, rather than Samanid features.

³² Frye 2005.

³³ See <http://www.persianatesocieties.org> (accessed 11 November 2012).

³⁴ O’Kane 2009.

³⁵ Recently Shalem 2012. There has been an on-going debate as to whether the term “Islamic” can be generically used for describing the art, architecture and material culture of the Islamic world. Yet there is so far no alternative to replace this misleading term.

conquest when many figurative traditions of the Persian world were dismissed or modified. One category that did not match western art-historical concepts but was soon accepted as distinctively “Persian” as well as rightly “Islamic” along with architecture and “miniature” painting, especially among collectors and museums, was carpets. Surviving examples that can be attributed to the pre-Islamic Persian world were not discovered until the mid-20th century, although mediaeval descriptions of pre-Islamic Persian carpets were already well-known.³⁶ So-called “minor arts” or “arts and crafts,” according to western art-historical traditions, such as metalwork, ceramics and glass, were also viewed as subjects of investigation but more often integrated into the wider category of Islamic art.³⁷ Other genres of the “minor arts,” such as arms and armour, were also collected, but these were rarely viewed distinctively as Persian objects.³⁸

Euro-American scholarship inevitably Euro-Americanised the approaches to these topics. This is particularly the case with the single Persian “miniature” painting leaf, which was viewed and appreciated as the Persian equivalent to old master’s oil painting but not as a book illustration. Persian “miniature” painting was thus sold individually, as well as delicately framed, often with the emphasis on image rather than the entire page with text, and it was predominantly displayed on the wall in Euro-American museums. In order further to establish the connoisseurship of Persian “miniature” painting in the West, the role of painters was over-emphasised, while calligraphers and other aspects of the art of the book were downplayed. For most westerners of this time, undecipherable Arabic letters must have been viewed as irrelevant for the appreciation of “miniature” painting, and this tendency may have promoted the detachment of image from text both in scholarship and in art dealing.³⁹

³⁶ Studies about the legendary late-Sasanian “Spring of Khusraw” carpet, for example, were already published in the 19th century (see Karabacek 1881). The oldest surviving Persian pile carpet, dating back to the 5th century BC, was discovered in 1949 in the Pazyryk Valley in the Altai Mountains in Siberia and now in the collection of the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg (no. 1687/93) (see Loukonine and Ivanov 2003, no. 29).

³⁷ This category includes media, such as ivory and rock crystal, but these are more closely associated with the Islamic West than with the Persianate world.

³⁸ Possibly the most notable achievement in this field for the last decade is Moshtagh Khorasani 2006, which covers the history of Persian arms and armour from the bronze age to the 20th century and demonstrates their Persian characteristics.

³⁹ One may think of the fates of many important pre-modern copies of the *Shahname*, whose pages are dispersed across the globe; this unfavorable situation is a serious obstacle for scholars who first of all have to travel globally as far as the manuscript page goes. Thanks to the IT revolution in the past decade, we are now

While calligraphers were rarely featured in the early writing of Persian painting in the West,⁴⁰ some identifiable figures of Persian painting, like Riza ‘Abbasi (c. 1565/70–1635), became “stars” or “masters,” following the western art-historical canon.⁴¹ Deriving from pre-existing Persian notions of Kamal al-Din Bihzad (c. 1460–1535) as the “Second Mani” (in allusion to a 3rd-century prophet who used art to proselytise), this late-Timurid painter became “the Persian Michelangelo.” These juxtapositions enabled European scholarship to build up Europeanised constructs for the discussion of Persian art in which the lonely genius of a Bihzad or another painter eclipsed the manuscripts which contained the paintings.⁴² Like the Japanese rediscovery of Ukiyoe prints’ painters, the Persian world

virtually able to study dispersed manuscripts by using online databases, such as the Cambridge *Shahname* project (<http://shahnama.caret.cam.ac.uk/new/jnama/page/>, accessed 15 July 2012). Western connoisseurship of Persian painting not only gave a wrong picture of the Persian art of the book in the past but also in some cases caused an unrecoverable damage to some of the finest manuscripts, such as the Great Mongol *Shahname* and the Houghton *Shahname*.

⁴⁰ Clément Huart (1854–1926) was one of the early contributors to the study of calligraphy in Persian painting (Huart 1908). For more about the biography of Huart, see Calmard 2004. Having prepared the catalogues of Persian manuscripts in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, his compatriot, Edgard Blochet (1870–1937), became a leading historian of Persian painting. For his life and works, see Richard 1989.

⁴¹ The long series of publications about Riza the painter was stimulated by debates as to whether or not he was also a leading calligrapher with a similar name. The initial supposition of Sarre, shared by Eugen Mittwoch (1876–1942) (“Riza Abbasi, ein persischer Miniaturmaler”, *Kunst und Künstler*, 9, 1911, 45–53) about the dual-identity of Riza as the painter and the calligrapher, was questioned by Karabacek in his major essay, “Riza-i Abbasi, ein persischer Miniaturmaler” (published in *Sitzungsberichte, Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse*, 167, 1911, Vienna: 1–48). In response, Sarre and Mittwoch wrote a book of their own in which they upheld their previous thesis (*Zeichnungen von Riza Abbasi*, Munich, 1914), while a number of other, chiefly German, scholars also published their own ideas about Riza. The Riza ‘Abbasi controversy up to the early 1930s was summarised in Isabel Hubbard, “‘Alī Rizā-i ‘Abbāsī, calligrapher and painter”, *Ars Islamica*, 4, 1934, 282–91. After Karabacek’s opinion had proven right, ‘Ali Riza the calligrapher was rarely discussed any more, but the painter continued to be the subject of art-historical investigation, including Sheila Canby’s *The Rebellious Reformer: The Drawings and Paintings of Riza-yi ‘Abbasi of Isfahan* (London, 1996).

⁴² Emphasis on the individual artist was also reflected with the emerging modern art of Iran, as witnessed by Husayn Bihzad (Hossein Behzad, 1894–1968), bearing the name of his illustrious predecessor. For this painter, see Bombardier’s article in this volume.

rediscovered the Persian artists through European assessments. In turn, Iran and Tajikistan would name their new museums in honour of these rediscovered artists, hence the Riza ‘Abbasi Museum in Tehran (opened in 1977) and the Kamal al-Din Bihzad Museum in Dushanbe (opened in 1945). Ironically the latter museum does not possess any, even single painting by its denominator, but it has modern, European-inspired, oil paintings, intending to evoke the forgotten, if not mythical, past of the Tajik nation.⁴³

Such a painter-oriented taste ultimately set a borderline between art history (image) and philology (text) in Persian manuscript studies. This often resulted in distorted transliterations and misinterpretations of the text in the past.⁴⁴ Yet thanks to the rise of codicology in the field of Islamic manuscripts in recent days, it is a right time to declare that “miniature” painting no longer exists, and every aspect of the physical condition of Persian book painting has nowadays thoroughly been studied.

Apart from the creation of “miniature” painting, the western art-historical canon was also applied for the taxonomy of Persian painting according to the “school.” The painting school was often associated with a city or town, rather than the workshop managed by the master, due to the lack of information about named painters or masters in pre-modern Persian painting. This generated a certain bias towards periphery pictorial traditions. Many Persian painting schools outside the main genealogical lines, such as the Shaybanids (1500–99) of Central Asia,⁴⁵ the Aq Qoyunlu (1396–1508) of East Anatolia and West Persia,⁴⁶ or the dynasties of the Delhi Sultanate (1206–1555),⁴⁷ were for a long time overlooked; in some cases, these were categorised vaguely as the works of provincial schools under the more established dynastic names so as to justify their existence. By contrast, some unusual features found in what was ought to be evocations of the

⁴³ See, for example, fig. 4.3 in the present volume.

⁴⁴ To take an example, the name of Riza the painter has been transliterated in English in several confusing ways, such as Riza-i ‘Abbasi, Riza-yi ‘Abbasi, Riza-ye ‘Abbasi, Riza ‘Abbasi and so forth. The persistence of the unreasonable usage of the “-(y) i” or “-(y) e” structure (i.e., the *izafe* structure) in this name seems to have stemmed from the dispute between Sarre (Riza ‘Abbasi) and Karabacek (Riza-yi ‘Abbasi): the triumph of the latter’s correct biographical proposition ironically destined the survival of his incorrect rendering of the name. See note 41.

⁴⁵ Porter 1998.

⁴⁶ Rettig 2011.

⁴⁷ For a recent study of Delhi Sultanate painting and its visual culture, see Perrière 2008.

“high school” of Persian painting, such as that of the Timurids and the Safavids, were rejected as non-Persian.⁴⁸

The same tendency can be said about the carpet—the bestselling cultural product of Persia. Realising its immense commercial value through western assessments, the carpet industry revived in late Qajar and early Pahlavi times, and the image of the “Persian” carpet steadily took shape.⁴⁹ Persian carpets were essentially viewed as show displays rather than items of actual daily use by Euro-American scholars and collectors of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and the western collecting canon that highly praised the “high school” of carpets from courtly workshops led to a long-lasting taxonomy of Persian carpets according to regions rather than techniques. Silky carpets from courtly workshops began to be regarded as fine arts products, whereas roughly-woven rugs of Central Asian tribes were considered as ethnographical materials.⁵⁰

Besides the aforementioned disciplines, namely art history and ethnography, archaeology also made a significant contribution to the shaping of our view towards Persian Islamic art.⁵¹ Due to the theological aversion to burial rites, material remains of Islamic Persia are mainly from urban sites, thus reflecting the life of not only the ruling class but also the working class. Such finds, especially ceramics, attracted little attention when they were initially discovered as sherds or fragments and mostly undecorated or uncoloured. Far from this original context, however, examples of various mediaeval Persian fine wares, such as *minai* and *lajvardina*, with the perfect shape and vivid colour, began to appear in the western art market, and gradually lost much of their archaeological

⁴⁸ For instance, our image of the 16th-century “school” of Shiraz has only recently been rectified by Uluç 2006. See also Kangarani (ed.) 2008 for the reconsideration of the school of Shiraz.

⁴⁹ See Rudner 2011.

⁵⁰ See Kadoi’s article in the present volume for further discussion of the formation of “Persian” carpet taste. For an ethnographical view to the art and material culture of Central Asia, see Voigt’s article in the present volume.

⁵¹ In recent years, several studies have been devoted to the development of Middle Eastern archaeology in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a scholarly discipline as well as a tool of nationalism and colonialism (see Goode 2007; Trümpler [ed.] 2010). Although this volume does not dwell upon archaeological missions in Persia during this time, some collecting activities among archaeologists will be referred to throughout the articles of the present volume. For a good overview of the development of archaeology in modern Iran, see Abdi 2001. See also the history of the German Archaeological Institute’s Tehran branch, a subject which was re-examined through an exhibition and an international conference in 2011 (Helwing and Rahempour [eds.] 2011).

profiles. Furthermore, the boom of Persian objects in the art market was, inevitably, linked to the growth of suspicious excavations and trading as well as the rise of fakes and forgeries of Persian objects in the late 19th and early 20th centuries; the commercialisation of Persian art had an unwelcome impact on the academia as well.⁵²

Finally, various 19th-century Eurocentric views to the art of the non-western world served to create a distorted, complicated timeline and hierarchy of Persian Islamic art. While the great mediaeval and post-mediaeval Islamic dynasties were viewed as equivalent to European Renaissance courts, modern Persian artistic production, especially that of the Qajar and early-Pahlavi periods, was, almost deliberately, excluded from the history of Persian art. The objects of the latter were defined as the traditional *crafts* of Persia,⁵³ although earlier examples of the same crafts acquired their honourable status as fine artworks. The study of Qajar art made a significant advancement in the last few decades, partially rectifying this situation. Yet post-Safavid Persian art in general still remains bound to the category of Islamic or Middle Eastern art instead of the global discourse of modern art, and it continues to suffer from neglect.⁵⁴

Persian Art in Central and East Europe: An Uncharted Field

This volume does not intend to offer a comprehensive view to the history of studying and collecting objects from Islamic Iran and Central Asia across the globe, nor does it aim at including all the well-known collections and scholarly activities in West Europe and North America, such as those which evolved in late 19th- and early 20th-century London, Paris and New York. Similarly, the present volume does not extend the

⁵² Many leading art historians were misled by forgeries in the past: besides the so-called “Buyid” textiles that began to appear on the market in the 1930s and led some scholars, including Dorothy Shepherd (1916–1992), to believe their authenticity, see, for instance, a lengthy monograph by Gaston Wiet which was devoted to a group of mediaeval-looking silks (*Soieries persanes*, Cairo, 1947). For forgeries of Persian art and smuggling from Iran, see, for example, Muscarella 2000, Majd 2003 and entries of “forgeries” in the *Elr*.

⁵³ See Wulff 1966 and recently Floor 2003.

⁵⁴ Despite recent exhibitions, such as Karlsruhe 2010, in which this problem has been readdressed, yet another show of Iranian *contemporary* art has been opened at the Museum of *Ethnography* in Warsaw at the time of writing this article (see Malek-Madani [ed.] 2012). For the display of non-western contemporary art in ethnographical contexts, see Shatanawi 2009.

full discussion into the perception of “Persian art” among the collectors and scholars of modern-day Iran, since this requires a separate, monograph-length book; it is hoped that such a scholarly endeavour will be initiated and pursued in the near future.⁵⁵

For the same token, it is beyond the scope of the current volume to deal extensively with the reception of Persian Islamic art in West/South Europe (e.g. France, Great Britain, Ireland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Greece and Switzerland) and North America,⁵⁶ the Scandinavian,⁵⁷ as well as the Gulf states,⁵⁸ Anatolia,⁵⁹ the Indian Sub-continent,⁶⁰ Russia⁶¹ and the Caucasus.⁶² The omissions also include the

⁵⁵ Several notable attempts have already been made on the self-reassessment of cultural heritage in the Islamic Middle East. As for the rise of cultural institutions in the region, Shaw has conducted a pioneering investigation into the birth of modern museums in Ottoman Turkey, stressing their uniqueness, not merely as a result of westernisation but as part of Ottoman identity-making process (see Shaw 2003). Turning to Egypt, the Hungarian architect and founding director of the Arab Museum in Cairo, Max Herz (1856–1919), played an important role in the formation of modern Egyptian cultural identity: his life and career has been thoroughly studied by Ormos (Ormos 2009; Herz will be referred to in Szántó’s article in the present volume). Research also has started on the development of museology in Iran that can be traced back to 1876, the foundation year of the Imperial Museum (*Talar-i Muze*); this museum was established in the wake of Nasir al-Din Shah’s (r. 1848–96) first European Grand Tour (1873) (see Ekhtiar 2007).

⁵⁶ See relevant entries on Islamic art collections (including Persian Islamic objects) in Ådahl and Ahlund 2000. For the development of Persian studies in France, the German-speaking world, Italy and the Netherlands, see Hourcade 1987; Fragner 1987; Piemontese 1987; Bruijn 1987, respectively. See also Gray 1985.

⁵⁷ Besides relevant entries in Ådahl and Ahlund 2000, see major publications by the David Collection in Copenhagen (e.g. Folsach 2001); see also Edahl [Ådahl] 2008 for the Swedish collections of Persian art.

⁵⁸ Although the Gulf collections of Persian art are relatively new as museum or private collections (e.g. Qatar and Kuwait), it is interesting to note that some important collections of Persian or Islamic art that had formerly been in the West recently found their way to the Gulf region.

⁵⁹ See, for example, the catalogue of the ground-breaking exhibition of the Turks at the Royal Academy of Arts in London in 2005 (London 2005) that featured many Persian Islamic objects from Turkish collections, notably the Topkapı Saray Museum in Istanbul and the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art in Istanbul.

⁶⁰ Wink 1996–7 should be quoted as a comprehensive monograph about the Persian-Islamic cultural and artistic synthesis in India. It helps to understand how the patronage of, for example, the Mughal Emperor Akbar (1556–1605), was not just about the emergence of Mughal art through the migration of Persian artists but also the development of the vast Persian manuscript collections that included many