

## *Editorial*

THE SIXTEEN PAPERS published in this special edition of the *La Trobe Journal* were first presented at the conference held in April 2012 at the State Library of Victoria (SLV) to accompany its landmark exhibition, *Love and Devotion: from Persia and beyond*. The exhibition was developed by the SLV in partnership with the Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, and was the first major exhibition of historic Persian manuscripts to be held in Australia. *Love and Devotion* was later presented in Oxford in a reduced format from 28 November 2012 until 28 April 2013.

The Melbourne conference, titled *Love and Devotion: Persian cultural crossroads*, attracted a capacity audience with more than 500 people attending the keynote address given by Professor Charles Melville of the University of Cambridge. His paper addressed the exhibition themes of the beauty of Persian manuscripts and literature and their spread beyond the territorial borders of Iran in a cultural sphere that by the early-16th century incorporated Central Asia and the empires of the Mughals in India and the Ottoman Turks in Anatolia and in south-east Europe. This cultural diffusion was accompanied by a gradual intertwining of poetic expressions of earthly and spiritual love; although the artists who were commissioned to illustrate the increasingly luxurious manuscripts mostly confined themselves to a repertoire of earthly passion, heroic deeds of devotion to king and country and bonds between spiritual masters and their youthful devotees.

As Stefano Carboni recounts, many stories in the Persianate tradition incorporated premonitions and dreams, spirits and talismans into their narratives and illustrations. His paper focuses on a rare manuscript from the Bodleian collection that includes an intriguing sequence of illustrations of demonic and other underworld figures who play a role in forging human destiny. Alasdair Watson traces the origins of the classic Persian story of the ill-fated love between Layla and Majnun: a tale that originated in Arabic legend and evolved into a Sufi allegory. Zahra Taheri examines the significant role that female devotees played in the life and spiritual legacy of the great Sufi poet, Maulana Jalal al-Din Rumi. In his adopted home of Konya, a cosmopolitan cultural centre in central Anatolia, Rumi produced works that eloquently synthesised Muslim Arab sources, as well as Hellenistic, Jewish, Christian, Persian and Indian traditions.

Stories from these various traditions were part of the fluid cultural exchange between Europe and the Islamic world that was especially pronounced during the era of the Crusades (11th – 13th centuries) and the period from the 14th to 16th centuries that coincided with the Italian Renaissance. Danijela Kambaskovic-Sawers examines aspects of the dual nature of love as expressed in some of Shakespeare's female characters. The SLV's rich holdings of European travel accounts form the basis for Clare Williamson's account of several French scholars and merchants who travelled to Persia in the 17th century while Shelley Meagher reveals politically-charged Persianate elements in the work of the 19th-century Irish poet, Thomas Moore. The dynamics of cross-cultural

discourse and the transformational powers of love are explored in a moving paper by Marcelo Stamm that examines the intense relationship between the work of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and that of the medieval Persian poet, Hafiz, as well as Goethe's romantic and literary encounter with Marianne von Willemer.

The process of the cross-cultural reach of poetic narratives and their illustrations throughout the Persianate cultural sphere was arguably more straightforward: sometimes closely following the Persian originals, and on other occasions introducing deliberate variations. Barbara Brend presents a close-up view of the illustrations of a manuscript, recently acquired by the SLV: a work by the Persian-language, Indian poet Amir Khusrau who was active at the turn of the 14th century; while Lesley Forbes provides a wider survey of the Bodleian Library's significant holdings of illustrated Mughal manuscripts. Mario Casari traces the gradual appreciation of Persian literature in early-modern Europe, and in particular the circulation and reception of copies of the *Shahnama* ('Book of Kings') in Italy, a process that culminated in the first European translations of the great Persian epic in the 19th century.

The contemporary legacy of classical Persian poetry is beautifully demonstrated in the photo-essay of works by Hossein Valamanesh; by Ali Alizadeh's insights into the ways modern Australian poets have used the *ghazal*, the main form of Persian verse; by Anne Démy-Geroe's comparison of the cinematic treatment of love in two recent Iranian productions; and by Gay Breyley's up-to-the-minute assessment of the resonance of classic Persian poetry and music in modern-day Iran.

Finally, Mammad Aidani explores the impact of the classical Persian poets on the self-understanding of Iranians today. With particular reference to Rumi, he interprets the wider meaning of the word 'devotion'; as the dialogue of friendship, conversation, love, community and search for the authentic self as well as the divine that is the essence of classical Persian poetry and the key to its universal appeal.

***Susan Scollay, Guest Editor***

#### ***Note to the reader***

The terms 'Persia' and 'Iran' have been used almost interchangeably. The language spoken by most Iranians is 'Farsi', but the term 'Persian' is widely accepted in English. A simplified form of transliteration from Persian and Arabic is used throughout the text. The system follows that of the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* but has omitted most diacritics with the exception of the consonants 'ayn ( ' ) and hamza ( ' ). All citations and notes follow authors' original transliteration. Modern Turkish orthography has been used for names, places and citations in Turkish. All manuscripts that are dated in the Islamic calendar are given their Hegira or AH dates first, with the corresponding common era (CE) dates following in parentheses. All other dates can be assumed to be CE, with only those up to the year 1000 noted as such, and with BCE dates specified when appropriate.



Iran and the geographical extent of the Persianate cultural sphere c. 1600. Map by Chandra Jayasuriya.

