

particular, the chapter on Tabrizi contains exceedingly obtuse explanations (for example, p. 186–87) and appears underdeveloped. This Esots acknowledges in the final pages of the work, describing his study's conclusions as “tentative” and “provisional” (p. 228–29). *Patterns of Wisdom* is still a rigorous, well-researched, and enthralling work that enhances understanding of Safavid philosophy and is certainly an apt and important contribution to The Institute of Ismaili Studies' *Shi'i Heritage Series*. Assuming acquaintance with the philosophical grammar of Esots's luminaries, those interested may benefit from reading Chapter Four alone. This section provides a long-overdue comparison between the work's three central figures, analyzing their points of accord and departure in marvelous commentarial strokes.

The addition of Rajab 'Ali Tabrizi and his commentator, 'Ali Quli b. Qarachaghay Khan, to Esots's study is refreshing given the dearth of information available about them in English sources. Nevertheless, Esots's embrace of the Mir Damad/Tabrizi classification hardly represents a challenge to the School of Isfahan's prevailing paradigms that typically include Sadra. One may still aver that, despite their disparate conclusions over certain matters of philosophy, members that include Sadra were conversant with one another, face-to-face and through their works, and at times occupied a geographic space important for its incubation of Shi'i thought. Arguments over the precise combination of scholars and those that count as the most definitive or representative of the school are likely to remain abound, despite Esots's best efforts to set the record straight.

Patterns of Wisdom in Safavid Iran is not a radical departure from the typical course on Safavid thought; it is an augmentation of the current curriculum, supplementing the touchstone contributions of Corbin, and more recently those of Sajjad Rizvi and Sayeh Meisami, while integrating many others often neglected. Too frequently are the most credible Persian-speaking voices overlooked entirely. Against this regrettable pattern, Esots incorporates contemporary Iranian scholars such as 'Ali Karbasi-zada Isfahani, Muhammad 'Ali Mudarris Mutlaq, Dawud Husayni, and the late Sayyid Muhammad 'Ali Rawzati. Esots's own translations of Sadra's works into Russian are a crucial contribution to the scholarship of Islamic philosophy, introducing early modern works to a fresh epistemic audience and breathing new life into the Anglo/Francophone-dominated body of current literature. The sudden severing of this transmission line in the recent death of the author is a cruel circumstance. Esots's loss is only magnified by the degree of his scholarly achievement so early in his career, yet already extraordinary.

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The City as Anthology: Eroticism and Urbanity in Early Modern Isfahan. Kathryn Babayan (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021). Pp. 260. \$65.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9781503613386

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Scholars interested in exploring Safavid Iranian society are faced with a number of challenges, not least of which is the paucity of documentary and archival sources. While neighboring empires to the east and west, notably the Mughals and Ottomans, left behind

relatively rich archival legacies around social, cultural, economic, and legal history in both the center and the periphery, those of us working in the Safavid area often struggle to locate textual material whose provenance is not a highly-placed bureaucrat-chronicler, popular court poet, or jurist-cum-philosopher. Put another way, how we understand the Safavid historical past has been largely framed by a prescriptive, court-sanctioned agenda that allows for little in the way of alternate or contradictory perceptions of how people understood their social and cultural environments; this is only more so when we consider important issues of gender, sexuality, and sexual orientation. For these reasons, Kathryn Babayan's new study, *The City as Anthology: Eroticism and Urbanity in Early Modern Isfahan*, is a very welcome addition and, as such, will have significant impact on how we conceive of Isfahan, and Safavid society in general, at such a crucial juncture in early modern Islamic history.

Babayan is principally drawn to an underutilized genre of historical material: seventeenth-century anthologies (*majmu'ahs*, *muraqq'as*) containing a wide array of documents—short treatises on sundry topics (piety, liturgy, love, etc.), poems, portraits, maps, endowment deeds, almanacs, personal letters, and so on—that were copied and kept in family archives. Working with the semiotics of Barthes *et al.*, Babayan's objective is to use this wealth of Isfahan-centric archival material to read the city as text, thus providing a fresh take on the notion of “*adab* as urbanity” and how denizens fashioned friendships and relationships at a time of great flux in Safavid society. To be accurate, this is not the only source material that Babayan utilizes in *The City as Anthology*; she also looks at, for instance, the famous wall paintings at Chihil Sutun and different types of epigraphic evidence situated on Isfahani monuments. Thus, we encounter a greater economy of *adab* in seventeenth-century Isfahan, whereby “the culture of *adab* had to be learned and performed in the elite, artisan, and merchant sectors of a society in the making” (p. 12). While there was a broader, state-sanctioned “*adab*-izing project,” Babayan is also drawn to the interpersonal world of *adab*—represented well in the genre of *ikhwani* letters (personal correspondence)—and how notions of love and friendship were also framed through a lens of homoeroticism and homosociality.

We are introduced to the broader strokes of Babayan's “*adab*-izing project” in Chapter 1 (“Imperial Visions of Sovereignty”), which demonstrates that Shah Abbas saw the urban landscape of Isfahan as a palimpsest of sorts, whereby textual and visual prescriptions of concepts like authority, discipleship, and subjugation could be inscribed and re-inscribed. The shah's renovation and unveiling of the “new” Isfahan in 1593–94, with the *Naqsh-e Jahan* as its centerpiece, was supplemented by lightshows, murals, and fireworks drawing images and references from the magical *aja'ib al-makhlūqat* (“wonders of the world”) genre; along with inscriptions found at the Lutfullah and Shah's Mosques, we find intriguing evidence of the degree to which the state was invested in public discourse about *adab*. Babayan's “city as text” gaze turns to the well-known wall painting of Shah Abbas I and Vali Muhammad Khan in the Audience Hall of the Chihil Sutun. Often appreciated as indicative of a shift in aesthetics, this particular wall painting (commissioned by Abbas's grandson, Shah Abbas II) yields fascinating interpretative evidence upon closer inspection. While Shah Abbas is profiled as the “sovereign cup-bearer”—referencing Ali ibn Abi Talib's cosmological status as God's cupbearer and thus Abbas's inheritance of that responsibility—different registers of the painting allow us to reconceive Safavid public discourses about gender, sexuality, and religious authorities' prescriptions regarding social conformity. Babayan examines, for instance, the interactions of depicted courtiers, performers, and dancers—both male and female—to suggest that homosociality and expressions of love/friendship was a key component of the “*adab*izing project.” However, by the end of the seventeenth century, Shi'i jurists and scholars like Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi were working hard to redefine corporate notions of *adab*, and in doing so targeted questionable behavior like drinking, boy-gazing, fraternization with Jews and Christians, and “illicit” homosexual sex; as an example, we read how the smooth skin of young men was deemed objectionable, and hadiths promoting moustache-growth were increasingly endorsed and transmitted by Shi'ite juridicals.

Babayan moves decisively away from the grand plazas of state-centric *adab* production towards local neighborhoods and less-trammeled alleyways in Chapter 2 (“Collecting, Self-Fashioning, and Community”). Here, she focuses on two anthologies by two distinctive personalities—one a Sufi-inspired scholar (Aqa Husain Khwansari, d. 1686), the other a professional artist (Muhammad Qasim, d. 1660)—to provide a sense of the depth and diversity of these anthologies. In both cases, there are glimpses into debates over discipline and the body: Khwansari incorporates a treatise on carnal instincts (the *Jami` al-lazzat*) to justify the banning of shaving pubic hair, while Qasim’s *muraqqa`* includes the painting of a teacher bastinadoing the soles of a miserable student (which graces the cover of *The City as Anthology*). Babayan’s exploration of these anthologies, and the curatorial choices by both Khwansari and Qasim to include specific treatises and paintings, gives us pause to consider the socio-cultural implications of why and how such collections came to exist; styled as “discursive patchworks,” the author subtly acknowledges how a term like *muraqq`a* occupies a multi-epistemic space shaped by both urban *adab* and ascetic Sufism, as *muraqq`a* often denotes the patched cloak worn by Sufi shaiikhs.

Chapter 3 (“Disturbing the City”) examines the genre of *shahrashub*, whereby authors approach textual space “for visualizing, reading and writing desire” (p. 110). As “city disturbers,” these authors serve as both urban guides and producers of homoerotic *adab*, and Babayan focuses in this chapter on the textual relationship between two juridicals, Mir Rukn al-Din and Aqa Mansur Simnani. In response to a letter from Mir Rukhn al-Din, Aqa Mansur sends a manual (or guide) “for afflicted lovers,” whereby the author invites Mir Rukn al-Din to “discover homosocial desire in the city of Isfahan” (117). Fascinatingly, the author provides his readers with a detailed itinerary of how and where to gaze (*nazar*) and experience male eroticism. Babayan walks us through Aqa Mansur’s stations of desire, beginning with the small bazaar (*timcha*) of the tobacco vendor near the eastern gate of the grand square and ending with the rag-sellers’ market at New Street (*kucha-yi naw*). The latter is the final point of release for Aqa Mansur: “go to New Street, where the peacock-like rag sellers reside; drunk with they desire they await intercourse” (135).

The epistolographic dimension of such *majmu`ahs* is obviously quite rich, and Babayan profiles the personal (*ikhwani*) letters exchanged among the various notables of seventeenth-century Isfahan in Chapter 4. Codes of friendship between men were delineated and demarcated through epistolary prose; indeed, one detects a transformation of sorts here, whereby Isfahani urbanites opted for a genre of highly stylized prose, with strong rhyming patterns and motifs associated with *ghazals*, to express their desires and frustrations. Babayan provides numerous examples from various collections to support her emphasis on the “adabizing” project taking place in seventeenth-century Isfahan. Of particular interest is her profiling of letter-writing as a discursive strategy to not only remember past meetings between two individuals, but more importantly to imagine and visualize encounters in the future. To some extent, the tropes and imagery of such imagined meetings between lover and beloved is borrowed allegorical language from the Sufis. Didactic model *insha* texts like the late seventeenth-century *Munsha`at-e Sulaymani*, according to Babayan, “taught the etiquette of proper speech and discourse, but they also educated the letter writer in the ways that words conjured images that allowed for the reproduction of intimate encounters on paper” (p. 151). Babayan pushes further here, arguing that the epistolary representations found in personal *insha* material were in essence “stylized performances of emotions” that could be understood as ciphers for various erotic desires. In a deft maneuvering, Babayan shifts further in Chapter 4 from the textual to the visual by examining personal letters requesting sketches of beloveds by prominent artists. Thanks to this, we develop a new appreciation for the relatively well-known genre of stylized portraits (with examples provided by Reza Abbasi, Mu`in Musavvir, etc.) that became so popular in seventeenth-century Safavid Iran. We can see such portraiture as a materialization of the idealized imaginings preoccupying the minds of seventeenth-century Isfahani letter-writer, but Babayan goes on to argue that the subjects of these portraits are themselves in the very act of imagining missing and absent friends. For instance, Afzal Husayn’s *Youth with an Album* depicts a beautiful young


man in the act of reading a letter to a friend whose visage is actually depicted on a proximate pillow. Babayan interprets this as a visual representation of the act of *takhyil* (image evocation), which effectively defines the ontology of letter-writing and the mechanics of friendship.

The last chapter focuses on a particular anthology compiled in Isfahan by a famous family of administrators—the Urdubadis—in 1697, but which was subsequently re-organized, re-ordered, and re-bound on various occasions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries after being relocated to the family home of Urdubad (in the modern-day region of Nakhjavan). This chapter is arguably the most heterogeneous in terms of structure and theme, not surprising given the nature of this anthology and its assembly of an impossibly wide spectrum of material: diplomatic letters, short notes, poems, petitions, “wish-lists,” endowment deeds, and prefaces (*dibachas*). Babayan discovers and focuses here on a rare female voice in the form of a poem by an unnamed Urduabadi widow describing her travels (in the late 1690s?) from Isfahan to her family estates in Urdubad and on to Mecca. This poem, autobiographical in perspective, describes an intimate friendship with another woman in Isfahan that created such a flurry of gossip and suspicion that her paramour moved away. The widow’s later decision to perform *hajj* seems motivated more by alienation from her family in Isfahan; indeed, she directly compares herself to the tragic literary character Majnun, whose father dispatched him to the Kàba to prevent him seeing his beloved Layla. Babayan translates portions of this fascinating poetic text and we are drawn to the scene of the reunion between the widow and her Isfahani lover in the town of Urdubad: “Forty houses they placed between us/And inflicted separation between two bodies/For our hearts no cure save constraint/In separation, both of us have waited a century” (p. 189).

Babayan’s conclusion (“The Erotics of Urbanity”) reminds us of the centrality of *ishq*—especially with regard to mystical notions of eros—when understanding textual and visual representations of friendship and sociability in seventeenth-century Isfahan. Initially drawn to anthologies as a methodology to tell a social history of Isfahan, Babayan encountered in *majmu’ahs* and *muraqq’as* a discursive world that allowed for a new reading of social interaction and intimacy in the early modern Persianate urban environment. *The City as Anthology*, although slightly unwieldy at times as it shifts from detailed case study to detailed case study, is nonetheless extremely effective in its careful approach to a unique and complicated genre of archival material; the implications of these innovative readings are, in turn, powerfully conveyed by Babayan in an intricate prose and style of argumentation. In addition to introducing and rehabilitating this genre of anthologies, this study provides a “fresh take” and effectively re-aligns how we understand and interpret the constructs of gender and sexuality in Safavid Iran.

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Talattof, Kamran. *Nezami Ganjavi and Classical Persian Literature: Demystifying the Mystic*, Palgrave MacMillan, Switzerland, 2022, ISBN 978-3-030-97989-8, 284 pp.

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Was the prominent Persian poet Nezāmi Ganjavi (d. about 1209) a pious Muslim or a mystic? Or, as Talattof argues, was he “mystified” by scholars and literary critics, who interpreted his