

Preface and Acknowledgements

Losing Our Minds, Coming to Our Senses: Sensory Readings of Persian Literature and Culture represents a new approach to the study of Persian literature and Iranian cultural history. The chapters contained in this volume direct Persian cultural production toward the 'sensory turn' in the humanities and often offer an alternative to the dominance of strict socio-political approaches to Persian literary and cultural studies. Taken together, the chapters in *Losing Our Minds, Coming to Our Senses* offer a fresh look at a range of Persian poetics read through the sensoria of texts. The starting point for each chapter in the volume was the following question: How can the traditional senses be activated using text- or image-based cultural products? In answering that question, each chapter takes a distinct approach to the sensory effects of consuming texts, while also highlighting vital connections between sensorial aesthetics and politics. They carve out and define new spaces and directions for the study of Persian cultural production. The chapters in this volume, arranged in an order that is roughly chronological according to the main text(s) being analyzed, offer readings that pay close attention to the senses and bring to the fore the sounds, tastes, smells, textures, and sights of Persian cultural texts.

Such introductory projects, by nature, resist the kind of uniformity that one would expect from similar projects done in more developed fields and subfields. Here, we bring together a variety of approaches and styles, from descriptive to theoretical, and from lyrical to political, to demonstrate the many possible directions along which this subfield could develop further. Michael Beard's introduction provides a unique rationale for juxtaposing these essays by emphasizing their intertextual and/or conceptual connections. The Introduction, however, does not seek to impose an artificial uniformity on the volume and, quite to the contrary, it underlines the theoretical and stylistic autonomy of each chapter.

Several people, institutions and forums made the completion of this book possible. To begin with, our friends and colleagues at New York University and Rutgers University were some of the first to hear about many of

the ideas presented in the following pages and offered constructive feedback and support to help bring this collection of articles together as a book. Among them, we owe special thanks to Hala Halim, Robert McChesney and Peter Chelkowski from NYU and Sadia Abbas, Laura Lomas, Jack Lynch and Alex Seggerman at Rutgers University-Newark.

Many of the chapters in *Losing Our Minds, Coming to Our Senses* first emerged from conversations that began at the 2016 Iranian Studies Conference in Vienna and the 2018 World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies in Seville. These two interdisciplinary forums proved to be productive sites for the approaches taken by several of the volume's authors. Two colleagues who were involved with those conversations but unable to contribute to this volume are Orkideh Behrouzan and Frank Lewis, both of whom greatly helped us think through the very idea of a sensory approach to literature and what it might look like in the specific contexts of Persian literature.

We would like to thank our colleagues at Leiden University Press who saw the book through to publication, as well as to Samad Alavi and Claudia Yaghoobi, who offered constructive feedback on the first draft of the volume. We are especially grateful to Ali-Asghar Seyed-Gohrab who was involved in every stage of this project and offered help in every regard. Many other friends generously listened, offered advice, and lent their support for the project, among them: Arash Davari, Peyman Jafari, Joshua Jordan, Sean Lee, Amy Malek, and the late Patia Yasin. Last, but certainly not least, we are particularly thankful for the sharp editorial eye of Leili Kashani.

Inherently interdisciplinary, sensory studies is informed by a variety of disciplines including anthropology, history, musicology, art, and cultural studies, among others. It is a relatively new approach to the study of literature and an entirely new one in the contexts of both Persian literary studies and Iranian studies, more generally. The wide range of topics and approaches to Persian cultural texts explored by the authors in this volume point to both the newness and future possibilities of sensory studies in this context. We hope that this volume, along with recent translations into Persian of foundational texts in sensory studies, will help spur interest in the sensorially rich world that Persian culture has to offer.¹

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Notes

- 1 See, for example, a collection of articles by David Howes and Constance Classen, translated by Asghar Izadi-Jeiran, *Ensan Shenasi-ye Hessi* [Sensory Anthropology] (Tehran: Entesharat-e Forugh-Andishan-e Honar, 1395/2016), as well as two translations of Juhani Pallasmaa's *Eyes of the Skin*; one by Ramin Qods titled *Cheshman-e Pust: Me'mari va Edrakat-e Hessi* [Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and Sensory Perceptions] (Tehran: Ganj-e Honar va Parham-Naqsh, 1388/2009) and another by Alireza Fakhrkonandeh and Sara Golmakani, under the title of *Cheshman-e Pust: ba Maqaleh-i Tahlili bar Falsafeh-ye Maurice Merleau-Ponty va Me'mari* [Eyes of the Skin and an Analytic Article on the Philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Architecture] (Tehran: Nashr-e Cheshmeh, 1393/2014). A recent example of scholarship that analyzes the senses as part of its approach to Persian literature is Dominco Ingenito, *Beholding Beauty: Sa'di of Shiraz and the Aesthetics of Desire in Medieval Persian Poetry* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2020)