

Encyclopedia Proposal: World Literature in Parallel with Iranian History (4-Volume Series)

1. Project Vision and Mission Statement

Mission Statement This four-volume series interrogates the historiographical erasure of transnational Persianate identities, seeking to "deprovincialize" Persian literature by reframing it as a global phenomenon. The project facilitates an epistemological shift: moving away from the perception of Persian as the "ethnic property" of a singular nation-state and toward its recognition as a cosmopolitan process. By synthesizing literary production alongside the geopolitical ruptures of the Iranian plateau, this series challenges nativist interpreting practices, reading Persianate texts as worldly documents that have negotiated power and cultural imitation for millennia.

The Persianate Concept The project adopts the conceptual framework established by Marshall Hodgson to define the expansive reach of this cultural sphere: "The 'Persianate World' is a linguistic and literary process based on cultural imitation and power. It functioned as a cosmopolitan framework where diverse ethnic and religious groups—including Turks, Arabs, Hindus, Sikhs, and Jews—utilized Persian for literature, high culture, and inter-imperial communication, spanning a geography from the Mediterranean to the Syr Darya."

Structural Rationale A chronological and thematic structure is required to document the transition from the dawn of imperial administration and oral poetics to the medieval era—where Persian served as the "Latin of the East"—and finally to the modern period, characterized by nationalist redefinitions, the "Literary Return" myth, and the ideological frameworks of the twentieth century.

2. Volume I: Antiquity, Orality, and the Dawn of Empire

The Elamite and Achaemenid Foundation Volume I contrasts the Elamite "state-city" model—exemplified by the Chogha Zanbil Ziggurat and early cuneiform administration—with the subsequent Achaemenid imperial architecture. Rather than a simple replacement, the Achaemenid model absorbed Elamite precursors, with Cyrus the Great establishing a prototype for cosmopolitanism. This imperial model utilized religious and cultural tolerance as a tool for centralized administration, allowing diverse local structures to persist within a global framework.

Avestan and Parthian Orality The Parthian era, characterized by the "Mhestan" council of nobles, relied on a robust oral poetic tradition. Drawing on the research of Olga Davidson, this volume analyzes the structural transition of "prose into poetry," identifying the *Shahnama* as a literal "re-performance" of oral traditions in written form. Specifically, oral genres such as women's laments provided the thematic foundation for the classical written epics that would follow centuries later.

Sasanian Translation Movement The Sasanian period is documented as a pivotal "translation node." Middle Persian (Pahlavi) functioned as a vessel for bringing Sanskrit and Greek knowledge into the Iranian sphere, creating a pre-Islamic intellectual toolkit that informed the later Abbasid translation movements.

Linguistic and Literary Legacies of Antiquity | Political Entity | Literary/Linguistic Legacy | Architectural/Social Marker || ----- | ----- | ----- || **Elam** | Cuneiform; early state-city narratives. | Chogha Zanbil Ziggurat. || **Medes** | Early Iranian linguistic formation; oral traditions. | Ecbatana: regular,

multilayered, fortified. || **Achaemenid** | Administrative multilingualism; tolerance edicts. | Old Persian royal inscriptions; Persepolis. || **Parthian** | Performance of oral poetics; Mhestan council. | "Mhestan" (Council of Nobles/Peers). || **Sasanian** | Pahlavi literature; Zand/Avesta; Sanskrit translations. | Institutionalization of Zoroastrianism. |

3. Volume II: The Medieval Cosmopolis and the Global Lingua Franca (1000–1500 CE)

The Abbasid Translation Movement This volume analyzes the creation of a "Persianate intellectual toolkit." By translating Greek and Indian knowledge into Arabic and subsequently into Persian, scholars created a transregional framework that allowed for the synthesis of science, philosophy, and poetics from disparate civilizations. **Ferdowsi's Shahnama as World Literature** The *Shahnama* (11th Century) is presented as a classical epic with structural parallels to Homer or Virgil. Crucially, the volume documents the epic's longevity through modern adaptations, such as the *Book of Akbar* (1951–52), an Afghan epic poem about the First Anglo-Afghan War that utilized Ferdowsi's structural legacy to navigate modern anti-colonial sentiment in South Asia. **The Samanid Renaissance** The Samanid court at Bukhara is framed as the epicenter of a "Persianate" revival, where figures like Rudaki helped establish an Iranian identity within an Islamic framework. This era birthed the "Latin of the East," a language of diplomacy and spirituality for a diverse population of non-Persians. **The Three Pillars of the Medieval Cosmopolis**

1. **Persian as Lingua Franca** : The adoption of the language by Turks, Mongols, and South Asian administrators for inter-imperial communication.
2. **The Epic Synthesis** : The movement of the *Shahnama* across Eurasia, evolving from oral "re-performance" to a written structural blueprint for regional histories.
3. **The Translation Node** : The flourishing of scholarship that moved knowledge between Sanskrit, Greek, Arabic, and Persian.

4. Volume III: Transregional Encounters and the "Nationalist" Turn (1500–1900 CE)

The Indian Style and the Myth of "Bazgasht" Volume III explores the *Sabk-e Hindi* (Indian Style) as a global, connected space that ignored strict territorial boundaries. However, the 18th and 19th centuries saw the rise of the "Literary Return" (*Bazgasht-e Adabi*) movement in Iran. Kevin L. Schwartz critiques this as an "Iranian national myth" designed to reclaim Persian as the exclusive property of the Iranian nation. The *Bazgasht* poets rejected the Indian Style as "degenerate," purifying the language by reviving ancient styles (Ferdowsi, Hafez) to erase the contemporary voices of Central and South Asian poets. **The Breakup of the Persianate World** 19th-century colonialism and modernization forced "messy" cosmopolitan histories into the "tidy contours" of the nation-state. This resulted in the association of Persian strictly with Iran, leading to the institutional erasure of Persian's history in India and Central Asia. **Comparison of Persian Literary Ownership** | Dimension | Cosmopolitan Reality (Pre-1850) | Nationalist Myth (Post-1850) || ----- | ----- | ----- || **Ownership** | Shared medium for Turks, Hindus, Sikhs, and Arabs. | Exclusive "mother tongue" of the Iranian nation. || **Stylistic View** | *Sabk-e Hindi* as a global, connected space. | Indian Style as "degenerate"; "Return" to purity. || **Language of State** | Tool for multi-ethnic, transregional administrators. | Exclusive property of the Iranian nation-state. |

5. Volume IV: Modern Comparative Poetics and Institutional Challenges (1900–Present)

Internal Colonialism and the Persian Sufficiency Test This volume applies the concept of "Internal Colonialism" to describe the suppression of non-Persian languages in Iran. A visceral contemporary example of this "Perso-Shi'a centrism" is the **Persian language sufficiency test** introduced by the Department of Education for preschool children. If non-Persian children fail this test at age five, they are stigmatized and treated as having "biological defects." **Institutional History of Comparative Literature** Tracing the discipline from Fatemeh Sayyah to the 1979 Revolution, the volume documents the "Cultural Revolution's" impact. A key archival detail is the purge at **Allameh Tabataba'i University (ATU)**, which removed 13 undergraduate degrees in the humanities and enforced gender segregation to counter "Western cultural invasion." **State Ideology vs. World Literature** Analysis of "Adabiyat-i Farsi" textbooks reveals "curriculum blindness." Drama is excluded because it does not fit traditional Persian forms, and the selection of world literature is limited to ideologically sanctioned "Literature of Resistance" or texts supporting "Westoxication" (*Gharbzadegi*) theories. **Major Institutional Barriers to Global Comparative Literature in Iran**

- **Centralized Curricula** : State control prevents interdisciplinary study (e.g., prohibiting Persian students from taking gender studies).
- **Perso-Shi'a Centrism** : The instrumentalization of "comparison" to prove the superiority of the state religion and language.
- **Xenophobic Othering** : The depiction of world literature as a "cultural offensive" by the West.

6. Bilingual Executive Summary & Critical References

English Executive Summary This 4-volume encyclopedia interrogates the historiographical trajectory of World Literature in parallel with Iranian history, from the oral foundations of antiquity to the modern institutional barriers of comparative poetics. It defines the "Persianate World" as a transnational cosmopolitan process that served as a global lingua franca for a millennium. Volume I contrasts the Elamite state-city with Achaemenid imperial models and explores Davidson's analysis of oral "re-performance." Volume II details the medieval cosmopolis and the structural legacy of the *Shahnama* in South Asian adaptations like the *Book of Akbar*. Volume III critiques the "Literary Return" myth, which nationalized a previously global language by rejecting the "Indian Style" as degenerate. Volume IV addresses modern "Perso-Shi'a centrism," the impact of the Cultural Revolution at Allameh Tabataba'i University, and the visceral reality of "Internal Colonialism" manifest in the Persian language sufficiency tests for non-Persian children.

(Persian Summary) چشم‌انداز پروژه این مجموعه چهار جلدی، مسیر تاریخ‌نگاری ادبیات جهان را در موازی با تاریخ ایران، از بنیادهای شفاهی دوران باستان تا موانع نهادی مدرن در شعرشناسی تطبیقی، مورد پرسش قرار می‌دهد. این پروژه «جهان فارسی‌مآب» را به عنوان یک فرآیند فراملی و جهان‌شمول تعریف می‌کند که برای هزار سال به عنوان زبان مشترک جهانی عمل کرده است. جلد اول به تقابل مدل «دولت-شهر» ایلامی با مدل‌های امپراتوری هخامنشی و تحلیل الگا دیویدسن از «باز-اجرای شفاهی» می‌پردازد. جلد دوم مجمع‌الجزایر فرهنگی قرون وسطی و میراث ساختاری شاهنامه در اقتباس‌های جنوب آسیا مانند «اکبرنامه» را بررسی می‌کند. جلد سوم به نقد اسطوره «بازگشت ادبی» می‌پردازد که با طرد «سبک هندی» به عنوان سبکی منحط، یک زبان جهانی را ملی‌سازی کرد. جلد چهارم به «مرکزیت فارسی-شیعی» مدرن، تأثیر انقلاب فرهنگی در دانشگاه علامه طباطبائی و واقعیت ملموس «استعمار داخلی» می‌پردازد که در طرح‌هایی مانند «تست بسندگی زبان فارسی» برای کودکان **Master Reference List** غیرفارسی‌زبان تجلی یافته است.

- Abedinifard, Mostafa, Omid Azadibougar, and Amirhossein Vafa (Eds.). *Persian Literature as World Literature* . Bloomsbury Academic, 2021.
- Davidson, Olga M. *Comparative Literature and Classical Persian Poetics* . Ilex Foundation / Harvard University Press, 2000.
- Hodgkin, Samuel. *Persianate Verse and the Poetics of Eastern Internationalism* . Cambridge University Press, 2024.
- Khezri, Haidar. "Internal Colonialism and the Discipline of Comparative Literature in Iran." *Revista Brasileira de Literatura Comparada* , v. 23, n. 43, pp. 94-117, 2021.
- Schwartz, Kevin L. *Remapping Persian Literary History, 1700–1900* . Edinburgh University Press, 2020.
- Shamshiri, Babak, and Massih Zekavat. "World Literature in Iranian Persian Literature Textbooks." *Asian Journal of Education and e-Learning* , v. 2, n. 1, 2014.