

# MEDIATING SCRIPTURE JUDEO-PERSIAN TOBIT AS GLOBAL CROSSROADS

INTERDISCIPLINARY  
SYMPOSIUM

ORGANIZED BY  
MAHNAZ YOUSEFZADEH  
NYU  
&  
LAURENT HERIGHER  
BnF

DECEMBER 8 & 9, 2021

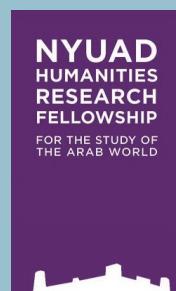


Hosted by NYU Abu Dhabi in collaboration with  
Bibliothèque Nationale de France and Louvre Abu Dhabi

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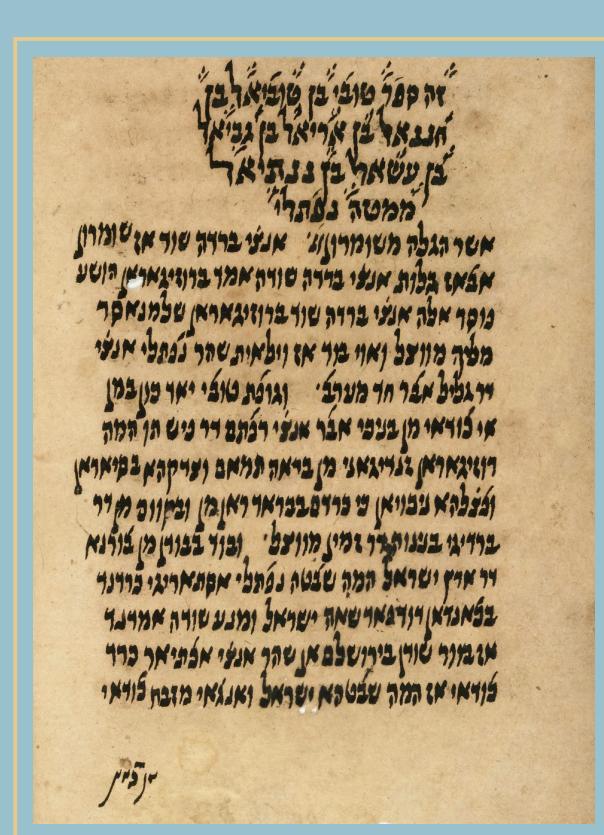
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his symposium is occasioned by the recent discovery of the only-known Judeo-Persian copy of the apocryphal Book of Tobit, one of the most uplifting stories of the Old Testament which has inspired explosions in the arts. Commissioned in 1600 in the Gulf city of Lār, the interdisciplinary and global crossroads of manuscript provides an important case study of global early modernity within a research agenda which includes global art history, Judeo-Persian and Judeo-Arabic studies, diplomatic and commercial relations, biblical studies, and natural philosophy of language. A two-day symposium brings prominent scholars into conversation about the significance of the global iterations and variations of the remarkable story and iconography of the Book of Tobit. On the occasion of this symposium, the manuscript BnF Hébreu 130 will travel back to the region and be exhibited at Louvre Abu Dhabi.



DECEMBER 8, 2021



## Welcome Remarks

1:00 pm - 1:30 pm

**Mariët Westermann, Vice Chancellor NYUAD**

**Mahnaz Yousefzadeh and Laurent Hericher**  
“Judeo-Persian Tobit: History and Manuscript”

## Webinar 1

### Keynote Panel

1:45: pm - 3:45 pm

**Moderator: Mahnaz Yousefzadeh**

- Pier Giorgio Borbone, Professore Ordinario in Orientalistica, University of Pisa, “Polyglot Bibles and the Persian World”
- Shaul Shaked, Schwarzmann University Professor Emeritus at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, “The Bible in Judeo-Persian Tradition”
- Angelo Michele Piemontese, Istituto Italiano di Studi Orientali, Rome, “G.B. Vecchietti’s Persian Scholarship”
- Francis Richard, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, “Judeo-Persian Manuscripts of G.B. Vecchietti at Bibliothèque Nationale de France”
- Lawrence H. Schiffman, Judge Abraham Lieberman Professor of Hebrew and Judaic Studies at New York University, “Transmissions and Transformations of Second Temple Literature”

## Webinar 2

### Language, Translation, and Tradition

4:00 pm - 5:00 pm

**Moderator: Laurent Hericher**

- “Hebrew Constantinople Tobit (1519)”, Loren Stuckenbruck, University of Munich.
- “Linguistic Thinking and Ideas on Language at the Typographia Medicea”, Margherita Farina, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris.
- “Topography as Theology in Tobit”, Jozsef Zsengeller, Karoli Gaspar University.

## Webinar 3

### Tobit in the Visual Arts

5:10 pm - 6:45 pm

**Moderator: Justin Stearns**

- “Botticelli’s Trinity Altarpiece: Tobias and the Angel and the Women of the Augustinian Order”, Scott Nethersole, Courtauld Institute and Laura Llewellyn, National Gallery in London.
- “Old Testament Apocrypha in European Protestant and Catholic Paintings”, Elizabeth Philpot, Gothenburg University.
- “Tobit in Medieval Manuscript Illustrations”, Rebecca Thierfeldt, Independent Scholar.
- “Tobias Iconography in Mughal Art”, Laura Parodi, University of Genoa.

DECEMBER 9, 2021



**Presentation of Louvre  
Abu Dhabi Special  
Exhibition and Screening  
“Reading Tobit”**

1:00 pm - 1:30 pm

The BnF manuscripts, Judeo-Persian Tobit and the Judeo-Persian Hagiographs which Vecchietti transliterated in 1605-1606 in India, will be on display from October 18th 2021 to February 18th 2022 at Louvre Abu Dhabi, wing 2, gallery 4 “the universal religions”.

- Readings by Laurent Hericher, Mahnaz Yousefzadeh, Rodrigo Luque

**Webinar 4**

1:30 pm - 2:00 pm

- Mariët Westermann, “Blind Spots: Julius Held, Rembrandt and Tobit

**Webinar 5**

**Tobit in Late Medieval  
Vernacular: Plays, Poetry,  
and Didactic Books**

2:10 pm - 3:30 pm

**Moderator: Mahnaz Yousefzadeh**

- “Journey and Place in the Florentine plays of Tobit”, Nerida Newbiggin, University of Sydney.
- “Accompanying Tobias: Lucrezia Tornabuoni’s Angel of Translation”, Jane Tylus, Yale University.
- “Tobit in the Vernacular and the Education of the Young in Quattrocento Florence”, Federico Botana. School of Advanced Studies, University of London.

**Webinar 6**

**Judeo-Arabic and  
Judeo-Persian Sacred  
Literature**

3:45 pm - 5:30 pm

**Moderator: TBA**

- “Judeo-Arabic Bible”, Ronny Vollandt, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich.
- “The Jewish communities of Lārestān: an attempt to introduce their heritage through the ages”, Ibrāhīm Šafī Ṭ, University of Tehran, Iran.
- “On Language and Religion: Egyptian Judeo-Arabic Sacred”, Benjamin Harry, New York University, Tel Aviv.
- “Judeo Persian Writing and Persian Language,” Nahid Pirnazar, UCLA

**Webinar 7**

**Tobit and the Global Early  
Modernity**

5:45 pm - 6:45 pm

**Moderator: TBA**

- “Books, Guns, and Diplomacy: The Vecchietti Brothers Between Iran, India, and the Mediterranean”, Brian Brege, Syracuse University.
- “Tobit, Capitalism, and Empire in 18th Century England”, Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, NYU.

**Closing Remarks**

6:45 pm

**Laurent Hericher and Mahnaz Yousefzadeh**



**Lawrence H. Schiffman** is the Judge Abraham Lieberman Professor of Hebrew and Judaic Studies at New York University and Director of the Global Network for Advanced Research in Jewish Studies. He is a specialist in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Judaism in Late Antiquity, the history of Jewish law, and Talmudic literature. He is the author of numerous books and more than 200 articles on the Dead Sea Scrolls and Rabbinic Judaism. Dr. Schiffman served as President of the Association for Jewish Studies and is currently on the Board of Directors of the American Friends of the Bible Lands Museum, Jerusalem and past Chair and Representative of the Orthodox Union for the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC), the Jewish liaison committee to the Vatican. Most recently, he was honored by the publication of *From Scrolls to Traditions* (Brill, 2020), a volume in his honor by former students. Dr. Schiffman was featured in numerous documentaries, including the PBS Nova series, four BBC documentaries on the scrolls, a Discovery special, the series “Mysteries of the Bible” (A&E) and “Kingdom of David” (PBS). He serves as a consultant to the Museum of the Bible in Washington, DC and is on the board of the American Friends of the Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem.

**Ibrāhīm Šafī'i** is a Ph.D. student in Ancient Iranian Languages at the University of Tehran; In addition to the Iranian languages with two approaches including linguistically and historically, his field of research includes others, including the relationship between Iranian and other related languages and cultures. He is a self-taught researcher of Semitic languages and an independent researcher of the history of the Jews of Iran, emphasizing the history of the Jewish community of Zarqān located in Fārs province, Iran.

**Margherita Farina** is a researcher at the laboratory of History of Linguistic Theories (UMR 7597 CNRS, Université de Paris). Her main research fields are the history of Syriac grammatical tradition, the development of Oriental studies and of linguistic theories in the Renaissance (including the early typography of Oriental languages) and Syriac codicology and the cataloging of Syriac manuscripts. She has worked on the history of the Oriental manuscript collections of Florence, the history of the Medici Oriental Press and the relations between the Oriental Churches and Rome in the 16th cent.

**Brian Brege** is an Assistant Professor at Syracuse University, is a historian of early modern Europe and its engagement with the wider world. His Stanford University dissertation, “The Empire That Wasn’t: The Grand Duchy of Tuscany and Empire, 1574-1609” was awarded the 2016 Ezio Cappadocia Prize for Best Unpublished Manuscript. His research has been supported by full-year fellowships from Fulbright, the Mellon Foundation, and Harvard University’s Villa I Tatti. His monograph, *Tuscany in the Age of Empire*, will be out with Harvard University Press in July 2021.



**Angelo Michele Piemontese** is Emeritus Professor of Persian Language and Literature at the University of Rome La Sapienza. Author of numerous studies, including an extensive bibliographic project on Persian manuscripts in Italian libraries and museums, and the identification of the oldest version of *Shahnameh*, and most recently, *Persia Vaticana* (2018). He is among the first scholars to create a catalogue of Persian manuscripts, including Vecchietti's Judeo-Persian collections in Italy.

**Rebecca Thierfeldt** studied art history at the Catholic University of Leuven and the Free University of Berlin. She completed her Master's Degree in Leuven with a thesis on the iconography of the Book of Tobit in miniatures (1400 and 1600). Currently, she is working at the Royal Library of Belgium.

**Scott Nethersole** is Reader in Italian Renaissance Art, 1400-1500 at The Courtauld Institute of Art, London. His book *Art and Violence in Early Renaissance Florence* was published in 2018. Before joining the faculty at The Courtauld in 2010, Scott Nethersole was the Harry M Weinrebe Curatorial Assistant at the National Gallery, London. He worked for Sotheby's between 2000-2004, after which he read for his doctorate, which he gained in 2008. He was a Michael Bromberg Fellow in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum in 2007; a Residential Fellow at the Nederlands Interuniversitair Kunsthistorisch Instituut te Florence (The Dutch University Institute for Art History in Florence) in 2012; and a Berenson Fellow at I Tatti, The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, Florence in 2019.

**Mariët Westermann** is Vice Chancellor and chief executive of New York University Abu Dhabi. She previously served as executive vice president of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, where she oversaw grant making and research. Westermann was also the first provost of NYU Abu Dhabi and director and professor of NYU's Institute of Fine Arts, Associate Director of research at the Clark Art Institute, and a faculty member at Rutgers University. As a historian of Netherlandish art she has authored numerous scholarly and museum publications, including the widely read *A Worldly Art: The Dutch Republic 1585-1718*, and curated the exhibition *Art and Home: Dutch Interiors in the Age of Rembrandt* (Denver Art Museum and Newark Museum). Her current research investigates the garden of Eden in the Judaic, Christian, and Islamic traditions. She earned a BA at Williams College and a PhD at the Institute of Fine Arts. Westermann serves on the boards of ALIPH (The International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas), the Educational Testing Service, and the Rijksmuseum, and chairs the Scholar Rescue Fund.



**Benjamin Hary** is the Site Director of NYUTA Tel Aviv and a Professor at the Skirball Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies. Up until 2014 he was a Professor of Hebrew, Arabic, and Linguistics and the Director of the Program in Linguistics at Emory University. He is the author of *Multiglossia in Judeo-Arabic* (1992), *Translating Religion* (2009) and *Daily Life in Israel* (2012, with R. Adler). He is the editor and co-editor of *Judaism and Islam* (2000), *Corpus Linguistics and Modern Hebrew* (2003), and *Esoteric and Exoteric Aspects in Judeo-Arabic Culture* in 2006. His recent *Languages in Jewish Communities, Past and Present* (2018, with Sarah Benor). Hary has published over 50 articles and book reviews on Judeo-Arabic, as well as Arabic and Hebrew linguistics, and has lectured widely in Europe, Israel, Egypt, the UAE, and North America. He is currently working on completing his book, *Sacred Texts in Egyptian Judeo-Arabic*. His research interests include Jewish language varieties in general and Judeo-Arabic in particular, Jews in the Islamic world, the politics of Arabic language use in Israeli society, corpus linguistics, Language and Religion, dialectology, and sociolinguistics.

**Nerida Newbigin** taught Italian language and literature at the University of Sydney. She is the author of *Feste d'Oltrarno: Plays in Churches in Fifteenth-Century Florence* (Olschki, 1996); with Barbara Wisch, *Acting on Faith: The Confraternity of the Gonfalone in Renaissance Rome* (Saint Joseph's University Press, 2013); with Kathleen Olive, an edition of the *Codice Rustici* (Olschki, 2015); and *Making a Play for God: The Sacre Rappresentazioni of Renaissance Florence* (Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2021), as well as numerous essays on aspects of Florentine festive culture.

**Federico Botana** is an art historian specialized in late medieval and Renaissance Italy. His research focuses on illuminated manuscripts, in particular the relationship between text and images. His publications include two books, *The Works of Mercy in Italian Medieval Art* (Brepols 2012) and *Learning through Images in the Renaissance: Illustrated Manuscripts and Education in Quattrocento Florence* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), and two articles in the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*. In 2013, he was awarded a three-year Leverhulme Trust Research Fellowship for his project 'Visual Pedagogy in Renaissance Tuscany'. He is currently a Research Fellow in the project CULTIVATE MSS: Cultural Values and the International Trade in Medieval European Manuscripts, c. 1900-1945, conducted at the Institute of English Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London, and financed by the European Research Council. Botana has also lectured extensively on the art and culture of Trecento and Quattrocento Italy.



**Laura Llewellyn** is Associate Curator of Renaissance Painting at The National Gallery in London. Prior to this she was Assistant Curator in the Department of Paintings at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles. She is co-curator of this year's exhibition at the Getty "Paolo Veneziano: Art and Devotion in 14th-century Venice" (July-Oct 2021), organized in partnership with The Frick Collection in New York. In addition to the accompanying exhibition catalogue (produced in association with Paul Holberton Publishing), recent publications include articles on Botticini's Saint Monica altarpiece and the Augustinian women of Florence's Oltrarno (Brepols, 2020), and on Gentile da Fabriano (Burlington, 2019). Laura received her PhD from The Courtauld Institute of Art in 2016.

**Pier Giorgio Borbone** was Associate Professor of Hebrew (2002-2008) before becoming a Full Professor of Semitic languages (2008-) at University of Pisa. His research and publications cover Biblical philology, and various aspects of the history, language, and culture of the Syriac Churches: codicology, epigraphy, relations with Central Asia and China, and the cultural exchanges between Europe and the Levant during the Renaissance. Most recently, he is the author of *Mar Yahballaha and Raban Sauma* (Tredition, 2021).

**Zvi Ben-Dor Benite** is Professor of History and of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at New York University. He teaches courses on Asian history during and after the Mongol period. Ben-Dor Benite's research centers on the interaction between religions in world history and cultural exchanges across vast space and deep time. He is the author of *The Dao of Muhammad: A Cultural History of Muslims in Late Imperial China* (Harvard, 2005); *The Ten Lost Tribes: A World History* (Oxford, 2009); and co-editor of *Modern Middle Eastern Jewish Thought: Writings on Identity, Culture, and Politics* (Brandeis, 2013); and an edited volume on Sovereignty (Columbia University Press).

**Loren T. Stuckenbruck** is chair of New Testament and Second Temple Judaism at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München. His numerous publications include *Angel Veneration and Christology*, *The Book of Giants from Qumran*, *1 Enoch 91 - 108*, *The Myth of Rebellious Angels*, and *The Texts of Tobit*. He is contributor to and editor of 15 volumes, and with Daniel Gurtner recently edited the two-volume *Encyclopedia of Second Temple Judaism*.

**Elizabeth Philpot** is a lecturer and art historian. She is a graduate of the Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London (BA (Hons)) and holds an MLitt in Art History and Biblical Studies from the University of Glasgow. Her PhD doctoral dissertation from the University of Göteborg, Sweden, is entitled *Old Testament Apocryphal Images in European Art*. She has presented papers on subjects from the OT Apocrypha at the Universities of Glasgow, Kent, Leeds, Nijmegen (The Netherlands) and Uppsala (Sweden). She has also had various essays published on Women in the Bible (Judith, Esther, Susanna and Mary Magdalene).



**Ronny Vollandt** is Professor of Judaic Studies at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich. Having graduated in 2007 with BA in Judaic Studies at Freie Universität Berlin and a MA at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Vollandt completed a Ph.D. in Semitic Philology under the supervision of Prof. Geoffrey Khan at the University of Cambridge in 2011. He is currently the first chairperson of the German Association of Jewish Studies and his teaching focuses on rabbinic Judaism and on the intellectual history of Jews in the Islamicate world. He researches Arabic versions of the Bible, Judaeo-Arabic literature, and Jewish cultural heritage, and above all manuscripts, in the Near East.

**Jane Tylus** specializes in late medieval and early modern European literature, religion, and culture, with secondary interests in 19th-20th century fiction. Her work has focused on the recovery and interrogation of lost and marginalized voices – historical personages, dialects and “parole pellegrine”, minor genres such as pastoral, secondary characters in plays, poems, and epics. She has also been active in the practice and theory of translation. Her current book project explores the ritual of departure in early modernity, especially how writers and artists sent their works into the world. She previously taught at NYU in Italian Studies and Comparative Literature, where she was founding faculty director of the Humanities Initiative, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She has been General Editor for the journal *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* since 2013, and currently sits on the advisory committee for PMLA.

**József Zsengellér** is Professor and Chair of Biblical Theology and History of Religions at the Theological Faculty of the Károli Gáspár University of the Hungarian Reformed Church in Budapest, Hungary. He is currently the rector of the Károli Gáspár University. He is a Calvinist minister, Hebraist and theologian. His main fields of research are the history, religion and literature of the Samaritans; the religion and literature of early Judaism with a focus on the Deuterocanonical literature; and the textual and canonical history of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. He is author and editor of several books, and has published more than 150 articles and papers in English, German and Hungarian. He also serves as editor and staff of three Hungarian and one international journals (*Biblische Notizen*).

**Francis Richard** is retired keeper of Persian manuscripts at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Paris), former director of the Islamic Art Department at the Louvre, of the Bulac Library (Paris) and of the French Institute for Studies in Central Asia. He has published catalogues of Persian manuscripts (1989 and 2013), as well as books and articles about missionaries, travelers, manuscripts, controversies and exchanges with the Middle East in the early modern period.

**Shaul Shaked** is Professor emeritus at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He is a member of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities and the Hungarian Academy of Science. He was awarded the Israel Prize in Linguistics in 2000. He has been a visiting professor in several institutions, among them UC Berkeley, Harvard, Columbia, NYU, the Freie Universität Berlin, the Collège de France, and the Eötvös Loránd University (Budapest). Among his books are: *Wisdom of the Sasanian sages; From Zoroastrian Iran to Islam; Dualism in transformation; Aramaic documents from Ancient Bactria* (with Joseph Naveh); *Aramaic bowl spells*, vol. 1 (with J.N. Ford and S. Bhayro); *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza* (2 volumes, with P. Schäfer and others), *Irano-Judaica* (6 volumes, with A. Netzer).



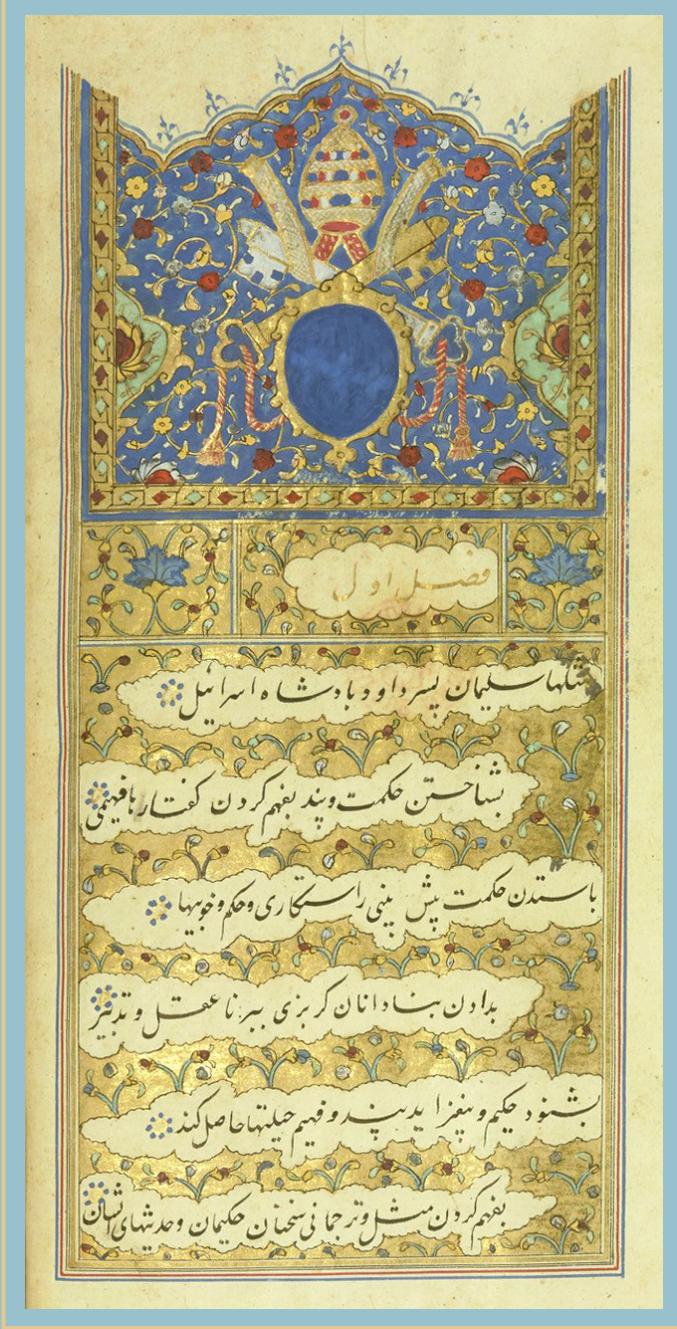
**Laura E. Parodi** received her PhD in Asian Art in 1999. She is a faculty member in the Department of Education (DISFOR) at the University of Genoa. She is the author of numerous essays on Mughal art and architecture. Her interests range from gardens to manuscript culture and court ceremonial. She has taught courses and seminars at the University of Oxford, University College Dublin, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and various Italian universities. She edited *The Visual World of Muslim India: The Art, Culture and Society of the Deccan in the Early Modern Era* (London, 2014) and coedited *Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies: An Introduction* (Hamburg, 2015). Current projects include the catalogue of an important private collection of Mughal paintings, and a book on the history and historiography of chaharbaghs.

**Nahid Pirnazar** has received her Ph.D. from UCLA, in Iranian Studies teaching the Habib Levy Visiting Professorship of Judeo-Persian Literature and The History of Iranian Jews at UCLA. Dr. Nahid Pirnazar is the founder and president of the academic research organization of "House of Judeo-Persian Manuscripts". She has edited the English translation of *The Women of Shahnameh* by Prof. Khaleghi Motlagh, (2012) and an edition of *Habib Levy, A Personal Chronicle of Jewish Life in Iran from the Late 19th Century to the Islamic Revolution* (2016). Dr. Pirnazar's works have been featured in English and Persian in Academic publications including, *Irano-Judaica*, *Irānshenāsi*, *Iran Nameh* and *Iran Namag*. She is also a contributor to the *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World* as well as *Encyclopedia Iranica* and the guest editor of the quarterly of *Iran Namag* (Summer, 2016).



**Mahnaz Yousefzadeh** is Professor of Global Liberal Studies at New York University since 2002. She is an Affiliate Professor of Art History and Italian at NYU Abu Dhabi and NYU respectively. She is the author of two books, *City and Nation in Italian Unification* (Palgrave Macmillan 2011), and *Florence's Embassy to the Sultan of Egypt* (Palgrave, 2019), as well as numerous articles on the relation of aesthetics and politics in European nation-building, and early modern relations between Italy and the Persico-Islamic Worlds.

**Laurent Hericher** serves as head curator of the Department of Oriental Manuscripts at the National Library of France. A graduate of the Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations in the Hebrew language and holder of a university degree in the Persian language, he holds a master's degree in the field of Jewish languages from the Sorbonne university. His research focused on the Judeo-Spanish translations of the Book of Psalms in the Constantinople edition in 1540 under the direction of Professor Vidal Sephiha holder of the Judeo-Spanish chair at the Sorbonne. A research student at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, he conducted field research in the oral traditions of Judeo-Spanish speaking Jews in the Balkans, under the supervision of David Bunis and Shlomo Morag. A graduate of the National Institute of Information Sciences and Libraries, he also served as director of the Museum of Art and History of Judaism in Paris. Exhibition curator, he is the author of two monographs and articles on the Hebrew and extra European manuscript collections of the National Library of France. He is Scientific Director at Brepols publishing house.



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