

### Statement of Research Interests

For the past sixteen years, I have studied the culture, literature, history, and politics of Iran. I researched modern Iran for my BA and first MA, and the medieval Persianate world for my second MA and PhD. While I continue to gain breadth in my understanding of the Iranian cosmopolis, my doctoral research focused on classical Persian mysticism and its multifaceted manifestations in classical literature of the Iranian world.

My forte is classical Persian literature with focus on mystical and esoteric literature from the 10th to 16th century. As the research projects in which I participated during my graduate studies often involved examining manuscripts, lithographs, and facsimiles of various medieval and early modern works in Persian, Ottoman Turkish and Arabic, I am also interested in codicology and cataloging.

In the near future, I hope to pursue several research projects. The first project will be to publish my doctoral thesis as a monograph under the tentative title *The Devil's Advocates: The Exoneration of Iblīs in Persian Mysticism*. A project also related to the topic of Iblīs will be to collect and catalogue all the depictions of Satan in medieval illuminated manuscripts from around the Muslim world, with the aim of publishing them in a critical monograph which will be the first of its kind in the fields of Iranian and Islamic studies. Thus far, I have collected and catalogued over forty-eight digital copies of these illuminated folios.

The next project will be to write a monograph in English about the life and teachings of the thirteenth-century antinomian Persian Sufi Shams al-Dīn Tabrīzī (d. ca. 1248), who was the spiritual master of the renowned Persian mystic Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273). Such monograph has never been published in the English language.

In addition, I am generally passionate about all aspects of Persian literature, especially poetry. The Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute of Iranian Studies' research project on Iranian women poets provides an excellent opportunity for me to collaborate with the researchers involved to examine this often understudied but immensely important area of Persian poetry. To that end, I am also interested undertaking extensive research in the Tavakoli Archive to examine various aspects of the publication and public reception of classical Persian literature in periodicals belonging to the

late Qajar and Pahlavi eras and what influence they might have had in the development of modern Persian poetry (*she 'r-e now*).

### Synopsis of the Monograph

This monograph investigates the portrayal of the Devil, known as Iblīs, in Perso-Islamic sources from the 3rd/9th to the 8th/14th centuries, with a focus being on mystical literature. Drawing upon a variety of primary source, including the Qur'an and its commentaries; the legends of the prophets; general histories; heresiologies; and Sufi texts and Persian mystical poetry, it aims to demonstrate that, in contrast to orthodox Islamic dogma, which describes Iblīs as a fiendish and malevolent being, numerous medieval Islamic sources, in both Arabic and Persian, portray him either as an ambiguous figure or in a positive light.

According to the story of Iblīs in the Qur'an, when God created Adam, he ordered all the angels to bow down before him. They all obeyed except Iblīs who refused, and for this reason God cursed and banished him. While based on this account, Muslim theologians viewed Iblīs as disobedient and evil, some Persian mystics viewed him as an angelic, luminous sage (*pīr*) who is a perfect Sufi, a true monotheist, and a steadfast lover of the Divine. Their esoteric interpretations of the Qur'anic story of Iblīs and his downfall were fundamentally different from those of mainstream Muslim theologians and exegetes.

In the view of these Persian mystics, Iblīs's refusal to prostrate himself before Adam, although exoterically considered an act of rebellion, was seen esoterically as the purest form of love and devotion to God, which elevated him to the highest ranks of Sufi sainthood. While this study will examine the notion of the sainthood of Iblīs in the works of some medieval Persian Sufis, it also proposes that the Persian mystics' embrace of Iblīs was more widespread than previously thought, and it influenced not only Persian mystical literature but also certain non-mystical genres, such as historiography, heresiology, and folklore.

The study of the Devil in medieval sources is a subfield still in its infancy. This monograph is an attempt to broaden our understanding of the diversity of views surrounding the figure of Iblīs that existed in various genres of medieval Perso-Islamic literature, with the focus on his positive portrayal in mystical sources. This monograph demonstrates that the Sufi fascination with Iblīs as

a model of resoluteness in his *tauḥīd*, i.e., the steadfastness of his love for God, and shown that Iblīs's appeal was not limited to Sufi or mystical texts.