

13-14 February 2025
International Conference

Sensescapes of War and Ritual in the Early Modern Islamic World



(Painting of the Battle of Chaldiran at the Chebel Sotoun Pavilion in Isfahan)

Location:

University Museum Utrecht | UMU
Lange Nieuwstraat 106, 3512 PN Utrecht

Time:

13-14 February (Thursday & Friday) 2025
09:00-17:00

Registration:

Entrance is free, but registration compulsory since seats are limited (sensis@uu.nl)

Conference Abstract:

“Sensescapes of War and Ritual in the Early Modern Islamic World” examines how warfare and religious rituals shaped sensory experiences in Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal societies during the 16th-19th centuries. Through presentations spanning military history, art history, literary studies, and religious studies, scholars explore how new military technologies and intensified ideological propaganda transformed collective religious identities and sensory regimes. The conference’s presentations investigate three key themes. First, papers examine how gunpowder weapons and siege warfare created new acoustic, olfactory, and tactile experiences that reshaped both battlefield encounters and urban life. Second, several studies analyze how religious rituals and ceremonies—from *Mevlid* commemorations to *Muharram* observances—deployed multisensory elements to forge confessional identities and communal bonds. Third, contributions explore how poets, chroniclers, and artists documented and mediated these sensory experiences through various media. The papers reveal how sensory experiences became instrumental in defining religious and political boundaries during this period of intense confessional competition. Whether through the thunderous sounds of cannon fire, the fragrant smoke of incense in mosques, or the visual splendor of military parades, sensory stimuli served to unite co-religionists while differentiating others. By examining these dynamics across Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal contexts, the conference seeks to demonstrate how attention to sensory history can deepen our understanding of state formation, religious transformation, and cultural exchange in the early modern Islamic world. The presentations collectively argue for incorporating sensory analysis into the study of early modern Islamic societies, suggesting that examining how people experienced and interpreted sensory phenomena is crucial for understanding processes of religious change, imperial expansion, and cross-cultural encounter.

This conference is made possible by the NWO Vici Grant (2023-2028), “Rosewater, Nightingale, and Gunpowder: A Sensory History of the Islamic World, c. 1500-1900.” SENSIS, Utrecht University’s Islamic sensory history research project, has also received funding from the Ammodo Foundation for Arts, Architecture, and Science.



February 13, Thursday

9:00-9:15

Welcoming Address & Introduction

Christian Lange & Yusuf Ünal

Panel I. The Sensory and Rhetorical Worlds of Early Modern Warfare

Chair: **Gianni Sievers** (Utrecht University)

9:15 **Abdullah Rıdvan Gökbel** (University of Tübingen), “Senses and Theology: The Religious and Sensory Dimensions of Archery in Fadā’il al-Jihād and Its Comparative Context in Early Modern Islamic Thought”

9:45 **Mustafa Sarı** (Istanbul University), “The Sensory Dimensions of War and Its Use as a Propaganda Tool in Early Modern Turkish Poetry”

10:15 -10:45 *Coffee Break*

Panel II. Sensing War and Conflict in Ottoman, Safavid, and European Realms

Chair: **Linda Pearce**

10:45 **Kahraman Şakul**, (Istanbul Medeniyet University), “The House of War as a Realm of the Senses: Ottoman Wars in Europe in the late Seventeenth Century”

11:15 **Yusuf Ünal** (Utrecht University), “Mobilizing Emotions, Conquering the Senses: Experiencing the Ottoman-Safavid Conflict and Sectarian Violence During the Seventeenth Century”

11:45-13:30 *Lunch Break*

Panel III. Sensing Violence: Artifacts, Manuscripts, and the Visual Culture of War

Chair: **Christian Lange** (Utrecht University)

13:30 **Zeinab Abdelhamed** (Vienna Museum), “The Multisensory Dimensions of the Ottoman Siege of Vienna: Insights from the Objects at the Vienna Museum”

14:00 **Hussein Keshani** (University of British Columbia), “Visualizing Violence Under the Safavids”

14:30 **Colin Mitchell** (Dalhousie University), “Celebration and Lament: Corporeal Moments in the Early Safavid Movement”

15:00-15:30 *Coffee Break*

15:30 *Keynote I*

Mark Smith (University of South Carolina), “Echoes of War: How Martial Senses Linger and Why They Matter”

16:30-16:45 *Wrap-up Day 1*

17:00 *Dinner for speakers*

February 14, Friday

9:00-9:15 *Welcome*

Panel I. Sensing Empire: Rituals, Spectacles, and Culinary Landscapes in Ottoman Istanbul

Chair: **Suzanne Compagnon** (Utrecht University)

9:15 **Damla Gürkan Anar** (Independent Scholar), “Poetry, Flavors, and Odors in the Mosque: Multisensory Royal Mevlid Ceremonies in Sultan Ahmed Mosque in the 17th Century”

9:45 **Philip Hahn** (Saarland University) & **Denise Klein** (The Leibniz Institute of European History), “Istanbul: The Culinary Capital of the Ottoman Empire”

10:15 **Işın Taylan** (Rijksmuseum), “Janissary Plunder: The Sound and Fury of Ottoman Diplomacy”

10:45-11:00 *Coffee Break*

Panel II. Sensing the Sacred: Bodies, Rituals, and Devotional Spaces in Early Modern Islam

Chair: **Richard Calis** (Utrecht University)

11:00 **Zeynep Oktay** (Boğaziçi University), “The Sensory Regime of the Saint’s Body in the Hagiography of Hacı Bektaş”

11:30 **Reza Daftarian** (University of London), “Shimmering Sanctity: Ayeneh-Kari and Ritual Embodiment in Shah Cheragh”

12:00-13:15 *Lunch Break*

Panel III. Sensing Power: Ritual, Memory, and Cultural Expression in Mughal India

Chair: **Yusuf Ünal** (Utrecht University)

13:15 **Bronwen Gulkis** (University of St Andrews), “Sensory Dimensions of Mughal Ceremony: The Windsor Padshahnama”

13:45 **Usman Hamid** (Northwestern University), “The Sense of Difference: Sunni Commemorations and Critique of ‘*Āshūrā*’ in Mughal Delhi”

14:15 **Gianni Sievers** (Utrecht University), “Sensing the City’s Misfortune: Tracing the Audible Past in *Shahr Ashob* Poetry on Late Mughal Delhi, c. 1739-1857”

14:45-15:00 *Coffee Break*

16:00 *Keynote II*

Linda Pearce (Mount Allison University), “The Trumpets Cried: Sound and the Senses in Processions during the Thirteen Years’ War (1593–1606)”

16:00-16:10 *Wrap-up Day II*

16:10-17:30 *Borrel*

ABSTRACTS

*Senses and Theology:
The Religious and Sensory Dimensions of Archery in Fadā'il al-Jihād
and Its Comparative Context in Early Modern Islamic Thought*

Abdullah Rıdvan Gökbel, M.A.

PhD Candidate

Center for Islamic Theology

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This paper examines the interplay between theology and sensory experiences in the early modern Islamic world, focusing on *Fadā'il al-Jihād* (16th century) while drawing comparative insights from *Kitāb al-İzāb fī al-Ramy* (16th century) and *Fada'il-i Ramy* (17th century). These manuscripts, originating from different periods and contexts, illuminate how archery as a religious and sensory practice was framed within theological, juridical, and spiritual discourses. While *Fadā'il al-Jihād* emphasizes the moral and theological significance of archery through hadith-based arguments, *Kitāb al-İzāb fī al-Ramy* delves into the practical and juridical aspects, addressing the regulation of archery competitions. In contrast, *Fada'il-i Ramy* foregrounds the spiritual and ethical dimensions, showcasing the religious underpinnings of archery as a devotional and communal act. This paper situates these works within the broader religio-political and sensory landscapes of the early modern Islamic world, exploring how sensory experiences—such as the tactile engagement with bows and arrows, the auditory rhythm of competitions, and the visual aesthetics of the equipment—intersected with theological principles. By analyzing how these texts construct a sensory world rooted in Islamic theology, the paper investigates key questions: How were sensory experiences interpreted and ritualized in religious contexts? What role did archery play in embedding theological principles into physical practices? How did sensory perceptions shape communal piety and confessional identities? Drawing on sensory history and theological analysis, this study demonstrates that sensory experiences were not merely physical but were integral to the religious fabric of early modern Islamic societies. By comparing these works, it highlights how sensory practices like archery bridged the spiritual and physical realms, offering new perspectives on the interplay between theology, ritual, and sensory experiences in the Ottoman and broader Islamic world.

*The Sensory Dimensions of War and Its Use as a Propaganda Tool
in Early Modern Turkish Poetry*

Mustafa Sarı, M.A.

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Department of Turkish-Islamic Literature Faculty of Theology

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Ottoman historiography was enriched not only by official chronicles but also by works such as *gazavatnames*, *fetihnames*, *sefernames*, and other poetic narratives. These texts often adopted poetic forms and played a significant role in capturing the sensory perception of warfare. Poets used historical verses and other literary formats to depict the emotional, moral, and impactful dimensions of war, allowing readers to experience its sensory richness. For example, in one *fetihname*, the sound of cannons frightening the enemy is described in a way that portrays them as “prostrating infidels.” This depiction serves multiple purposes: it provides a religious argument, creates a sensory experience that appeals to the reader’s imagination, and mocks the enemy to assert ideological superiority. Similarly, the clashing of swords, the whistling of arrows, and the deafening roars of cannons and muskets emphasize the grandeur of victory, while phrases like “sighs and groans rising to the heavens” evoke the despair and exhaustion of soldiers. Even in romantic epics, battle scenes are depicted with intricate sensory details characteristic of the early modern period. This paper examines how sensory aspects of war were used as propaganda tools in early modern Turkish poetry. It investigates the tendencies to convey sensory experiences through poetry and explores the diverse narrative elements that evolved during this period.

***The House of War as a Realm of Senses:
Ottoman Wars in Europe in the late 17th Century***

Kahraman Şakul, Ph.D.
Professor of History
Department of History
Istanbul Medeniyet University

The theme of this presentation is the sensecapes of war and ritual in the Ottoman military tradition in the last quarter of the 17th century. Focusing on the Ottoman wars in central-eastern Europe and the Mediterranean led by the Köprülü grand viziers, it aims to highlight the interplay between the psychological and emotional states of the eyewitnesses and their interpretation of war-related violence. Our discussion addresses some of the questions raised by the SENSIS research project. The question of how early modern authors construct, mediate, and express the sensorium of warfare is at the foreground of this presentation. The relevant answer is essential to show the crystallization of confessional differences within the Sunni Islamic traditions (the Ottoman-Tatar conflicts in the military campaigns) as well as the demonization of the Christian foes — Catholic and Orthodox alike. The sensory regimes and experiences addressed in this presentation range from the traumatic stress resulting from direct or indirect exposure to mine explosions in siege wars to mixed reactions to the music of the enemy. Conflictual accounts of the repulsive rotting enemy corpses on the one hand and beams of rays shining on the Muslim dead on the other serve to distinguish the genuine faith from the false one. Through an analysis of the narrative sources in Turkish written by various Ottoman eyewitnesses, we hope to shed light on the particular discourse that praised warfare as a means of converting the infidel lands to Muslim lands through purification of its repugnant sensecape.

*Mobilizing Emotions, Conquering the Senses:
Experiencing the Ottoman-Safavid Conflict and Sectarian Violence
During the Seventeenth Century*

Yusuf Ünal, Ph.D.

Postdoctoral Research Fellow
Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies
Utrecht University

The relationship between warfare and state formation in early modern history has been predominantly analyzed through the lens of military revolution(s) and bureaucratic centralization, as captured in Charles Tilly's famous dictum "War made the state, and the state made war." While this framework has enhanced our understanding of military technology, organization, and statecraft, it has largely overlooked how war shaped communities through sensory and emotional experiences. This research examines the sensory dimensions of Ottoman-Safavid warfare during the first half of the seventeenth century, focusing on Baghdad. The city of Baghdad, with its profound symbolic and strategic significance as the former seat of the caliphate, burial place of iconic Sunni and Shi'i figures, and gateway to the Indian Ocean, became a central battleground. Here, the Ottomans and Safavids, presenting themselves as the custodians of Sunnism and Shi'ism, employed cutting-edge war technologies, siege tactics, and defensive strategies. Drawing on historical chronicles, victory announcements, and war songs, this paper analyzes how multisensory experiences of war - from the acoustics of battle (cannon fire, war drums/cries, calls to prayer) to olfactory stimuli (gunpowder, stench, sacred scents) and touch (weapon handling, terrain navigation) - shaped how soldiers and civilians experienced and remembered these conflicts. Beyond viewing war solely as a machinery of destruction and state-building, this paper argues that warfare served as a constructive process that mobilized emotions, conquered the senses, and forged communities. The ways these sensory experiences were articulated drew heavily on broader cultural and religious discourses as the Ottoman and Safavid empires competed to capture both the territories and sensory allegiances of their Muslim subjects.

*The Multisensory Dimensions of the Ottoman Siege of Vienna:
Insights from the Objects at the Vienna Museum*

Zeinab Abdelhamed

Samuel H. Kress Interpretive Fellow
Vienna Museum

The Ottoman siege of Vienna is often narrated through the lens of warfare, politics, and conquest. However, the objects associated with this historical event—preserved in the collections of the

Vienna Museum (Wien Museum)—offer a unique window into the sensory dimensions of the siege. Recent research has revealed that some of these artifacts, long assumed to date to the period of the siege, actually belong to the 17th and 18th centuries, complicating traditional narratives. This paper investigates how these objects can be recontextualized to reveal the multisensory experience of the Ottoman presence in Vienna. Through a critical examination of artifacts such as incense burner, water flask, drum, maps and weaponry, this study explores the sensory vision of the siege, focusing on what these items can convey about soundscapes, textures, and visual aesthetics within the broader framework of Ottoman cultural practices. Drawing on sensory studies and material culture analysis, the paper reconstructs the experiences these objects might have evoked for both their original creators and later European audiences. This research aims to shed light on the sensory dimensions of Ottoman culture as reflected in the context of war and ritual, contributing to a nuanced understanding of how material artifacts shape and mediate cultural narratives.

Visualizing Violence Under the Safavids

Hussein Keshani, Ph.D.

Associate Professor

Art History, Creative Studies

The University of British Columbia

In 998 H / 1589-90 CE, a remarkable illustrated manuscript was completed in the city of Shiraz under the Safavid Empire (1501-1736 CE). It transcribed the text of the renowned Persian epic the *Shahnama* of Firdausi (935-1020 CE), a compilation of kingly and heroic tales from ancient Iran completed in the early 11th century under the Ghaznavids. Commonly known as the “Peck” *Shahnama* after its last American owner Clara S. Peck, who donated it to the current owner Princeton University Library, the manuscript was formerly purchased in Isfahan in 1631 CE by Khayrat Khan, an ambassador of the Deccani Qutb Shahi dynasty of India. He bought it from none other than the widow of the Safavid Shah Abbas I (d. 1629) and daughter of Khan Ahamad Khan Gilani, governor of the eastern province of Gilan. Of the 475 folios, 48 were lavishly illustrated by a team of artists of whom we only know the name of the scribe and calligrapher Qivam ibn Muhammad Shirazi. According to the scholar Marian Shreve Simpson, forty percent of the illustrated folios show scenes of war, or *razm*. The Princeton *Shahnama*’s visualizations of war are a consolidation of many conceptions of violence across centuries and geographies of the Persianate world. Firdausi’s verbal glamorizations contrast with his moral critiques that were later augmented by generations of Ilkhanid, Timurid and Safavid artists who imaginatively rendered word into image. The latter especially in the Princeton *Shahnama* showed war as overwhelmingly placid yet chaotic, beautiful yet bloody. Using this manuscript, this paper will discuss how Safavid miniatures were vital carriers and transformers of the memory of war and contributed to the visual sensorium of violence.

*Celebration and Lament:
Corporeal Moments in the Early Safavid Movement*

Colin Mitchell, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, Director, Minor in Middle East Studies
Department of History
Dalhousie University

The early modern Turco-Persianate landscape of the late 15th and early 16th century witnessed a particularly intense proliferation of popular, latitudinarian Sufi brotherhoods, particularly across eastern Anatolia and Azarbaijan. Arguably, such developments were part of a much greater transformation, often cast as a renewal (*tajaddud*), of Islamicate identity which saw the spread and popular embrace of the concepts, cosmologies, and epistemological lexicon of Sufism (pace Melvin-Koushki, Bashar, Binbas). Not surprisingly discussion of the sensorium is particularly rich in Sufi literature as it was the superior ability of the murshid to identify – through sight, hearing, touch, etc. – divine manifestations and understand their greater phenomenology. With a focus on the concept of the body, specifically the notion of corporeal sanctity, this particular paper examines these questions during an early phase of the Safavids (1475-1524). Beginning with the spiritual leadership of Shaikh Junaid (d. 1480) and ending with the Perso-Islamic monarchy of Shah Isma‘il (d. 1524), this period witnessed a profound shift in confessional orientations and religious sensibilities as Sufi and Shi‘ite ontologies became mixed and exchanged. The strong emphasis of both Sufism and Shi‘ism with regard to the body as a site of sanctity as well as being a site of greater spiritual trauma was both celebrated and lamented among the early Safavids. This paper aspires to address the interaction between violence and the sensorium by examining how Safavid court literature profiled specific “corporeal moments” of these generations of Safavid leadership (Junaid, Haidar, Isma‘il) during critical phases like assuming mantles of leadership, leading armies in battle, suffering martyrdom, and inflicting punishments on the vanquished.

*Echoes of War:
How Martial Senses Linger and Why They Matter*

Mark M. Smith, Ph.D.

Carolina Distinguished Professor of History
Department of History
University of South Carolina

Of late, historians of the senses have shown a healthy respect for the sensory experiences of war on both battlefield and home front. Unpacking and documenting what we might think of as “martial senses” has proven intellectually invigorating and granted us access to deeper understandings of a number of wars in a wide variety of places and times. Far less appreciated is how these war-time sensory experiences carried into peace time. Did they, in fact, linger? If so, what kind of work did

memories of martial senses perform and for whom? Taking the US Civil War as its starting point, this paper examines how sensory experiences and memories of that war shaped the United States' immediate postwar foreign policy. Martial senses from the Civil War were redeployed in the context of US imperialist initiatives after the War and proved especially important for shaping contemporaries' experience and understanding of how environmental disasters interacted with US foreign policy. The paper surveys the work done to date on the sensory history of war, presents a detailed case study of martial sensory echoes, and concludes by pondering how thinking about those echoes helps us appreciate ways in which wars, though temporally delimited by historians, hold the power to expand and continue the experience of war. Sensory echoes of war matter because they influence perceptions during times of peace; appreciating their lingering echoes invites us to wonder whether war ever truly ends.

***Poetry, Flavors, and Odors in the Mosque:
Multisensory Royal Mevlid Ceremonies in Sultan Ahmed Mosque in the 17th Century***

Damla Gürkan Anar, Ph.D.
Independent Scholar

In the late sixteenth century, the Ottoman court began to observe the annual *mevlid* ritual, commemorating the Prophet Muhammad's birth anniversary, as a royal ceremony in the sultanic mosques. *Mevlid* ritual had been incorporated into the sultanic mosques' festive calendar in the first decades of the 16th century and began to be celebrated in these monuments with the court's participation in the last decades of the same century. In the early 17th century, Sultan Ahmed I (r.1603-1617) involved *mevlid* as a courtly ceremony in the ritual program of his new congregational mosque, which served as one of the main venues of royal *mevlid* rituals throughout the centuries to come. This study investigates sensorial aspects of the courtly *mevlid* ceremonies observed in Sultan Ahmed Mosque in the 17th century. It focuses on the sensorial facets of these festive events' comprising elements involving the recital of the Qur'an and poems, the service of delicious and fragrant tables on ornate plates, the presentation of lavish gifts, and the burning of odorous incense, all taking place in a dazzling monument with extravagant decoration, and high acoustic qualities. It conceptualizes royal Ottoman *mevlid* ceremonies as multisensory events with parts appealing to different senses and addresses the intersensory or synesthetic aspects of the ritual's certain elements. The books of ceremonies (*defter-i teşrifat*), endowment deed and registers of Sultan Ahmed Mosque, accounting registers of the mosque's construction, and court chronicles form the main primary sources of this research.

*Istanbul:
The Culinary Capital of the Ottoman Empire*

Philip Hahn, Ph.D.

Professor of Early Modern History
Department of History
Saarland University

&

Denise Klein, Ph.D.

Researcher in Ottoman Studies
Leibniz Institute of European History

Although numerous studies have examined Istanbul's role as imperial capital, its expression in the sensory realm remains largely unexplored. How did authorities appeal to people's senses to highlight Istanbul's unique status in the empire? How did the city's inhabitants and visitors perceive and experience Istanbul in contrast to the rest of the empire? How did the empire and its people contribute to making Istanbul the imperial capital? And how did religious beliefs and practices shape sensory perceptions? Our talk addresses these questions in two parts. First, we examine the role Istanbulites attributed to their city within the sensory landscape of the Ottoman Empire. Taking Evliya Çelebi as a case study, we trace how this elite Istanbulite experienced the empire through sight, hearing, smell, and taste. Second, analysing various narrative sources, we look into the sensory connections between the capital and the provinces, exploring how Istanbul's residents recognized their city as the imperial capital. Our focus will mainly be on the culinary dimension. Departing from the existing literature on Ottoman foodways with its focus on food items and related crafts, we pay special attention to the multisensory perception of food and the role of migrants as key drivers in the mobility of goods, culinary practices, and tastes. Contrary to the usual narrative of how the metropolis influenced the periphery, we instead highlight—through the sensory lens—how the provinces and their diversity shaped the imperial center, making Istanbul the culinary capital of the empire.

*Janissary Plunder:
The Sound and Fury of Ottoman Diplomacy*

Işın Taylan, Ph.D.

Postdoctoral Mellon Fellow
the Rijksmuseum

Dish looting, dish plunder, or pot plundering (*çanak yağması*) is an Ottoman tradition rooted in ritualized looting (*yağma*). In this custom, hundreds of dishes were displayed in public spaces, inviting people to claim them in a rush upon receiving a signal from the authorities. While it appeared

chaotic, this event was an organized spectacle, most famously associated with the Janissaries of the Ottoman Empire. The tradition was intricately tied to the Janissaries' quarterly payment ceremonies, which were strategically scheduled to coincide with the reception of foreign ambassadors. As the ambassadors and their entourage entered the second courtyard of the palace, thousands of Janissaries would pour in to claim the food, creating a scene of energetic chaos. Descriptions of the event often highlighted its disorder: plates dropping to the ground, rice clinging to soldiers' faces, and a cacophony of noise and movement. Yet this orchestrated disarray amplified the spectacle's sensory and symbolic impact. At its core, dish plundering served dual purposes. It showcased the Ottoman dynasty's power and generosity to both domestic and foreign audiences, reinforcing the Sultan's authority and the empire's wealth. Simultaneously, it allowed the Janissaries to express their loyalty and gratitude toward the Sultan in a highly visible and participatory manner. The sensory overload—aromas of food, clattering of dishes, and tumultuous commotion—transformed the event into a powerful performative statement blending imperial policy with diplomacy. This article delves into how art captures the sensory and ceremonial essence of dish plundering. It examines Levni's detailed miniatures alongside Jean-Baptiste Vanmour's audience paintings, contextualized through protocol registers (*teşrifat defteri*) and European travelogues. Levni's and Vanmour's works vividly depict the multi-sensory dimensions of the event.

The Sensory Regime of the Saint's Body in the Hagiography of Hacı Bektaş

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Department of Turkish Language and Literature

Boğaziçi University

The late fifteenth-early sixteenth century prose hagiography of Hacı Bektaş (d. 1271?), eponym of the Bektashi order, presents a striking portrayal of Hacı Bektaş's spiritual power, which includes the ability to kill and give life by a simple gaze. This spiritual power is located in the body, as evidenced by the sacrality of the saint's blood and ablution water, but it also enables the radical transformation of the body upon will, such as shapeshifting. In defining the sainthood in the hagiography as an embodied material experience located in the senses, this paper seeks to question the role of the fluidity of the saint's body in the text. I will investigate how the fluid body of Hacı Bektaş engages in sensory relationships with his followers and opposers. In this regard, abjection towards the saint's body and overcoming this abjection appear to be main dynamics deciding the fates of Hacı Bektaş's interlocutors. The sensory experience of the saint is life-changing at all instances, leading to benediction or malediction, but it is precisely through the transgression of bodily boundaries, identified with the merging of spiritual selves, that a disciple may achieve spiritual perfection, becoming a saint themselves. All of this indicates the existence of a unique and unified sensory regime that serves as the framework for the work and presents a historical moment of foundation for Bektashi and Alevi religious traditions.

*Shimmering Sanctity:
Ayeneh-Kari and Ritual Embodiment in Shah Cheragh*

Reza Daftarian

PhD Researcher in Islamic Architectural History
Associate Lecturer
The Courtauld Institute of Art,
University of London

This paper focuses on the shrine of Shah Cheragh in Shiraz as a case study to explore the sensory dimensions of *ayeneh-kari* (mirror-work) in shaping devotional practices and religious identities during the Qajar period (1789–1925). As a pivotal yet understudied site, Shah Cheragh demonstrates the deliberate use of mirror mosaics to craft immersive sensory experiences that facilitated spiritual contemplation and emotional engagement during *ziyarat* (pilgrimage). Through fragmented reflections, refracted light, and inscriptions embedded within the mirror work, the Qajars transformed Shah Cheragh into a site that intertwined sacred and political authority. By situating the shrine’s architectural program within the sociopolitical topography of Qajar Iran, this paper argues that *ayeneh-kari* served as more than ornamentation. It became a medium of embodiment, linking pilgrims to the divine through sensory interactions with light, space, and text. Drawing on theories of sensory history and material culture, this study examines how the interplay between *ayeneh-kari*’s visual effects and the ritual practices at Shah Cheragh contributed to a collective sensory and spiritual experience. It highlights the Qajars’ strategic use of the shrine’s sensory landscape to assert continuity with Safavid traditions while reinforcing their own legitimacy. By narrowing its focus to Shah Cheragh, this paper offers new insights into the sensory politics of sacred space in early modern Iran, aligning with the conference’s exploration of the sensory dimensions of religious transformation and ritual.

*Sensory Dimensions of Mughal Ceremony:
The Windsor Padshahnama*

Bronwen Gulkis, Ph.D.

Lecturer in Global Early Modern Art History
University of St Andrews

Court life in Mughal India was punctuated by aestheticized rituals which reinforced the relationship between the Emperor, his subjects, and his territory. The visual language which developed during the period is often considered part of this imperial apparatus: the use of viewpoints that emphasized the Emperor, the proliferation of *darbār* (formal audience) scenes, and increasingly structured

compositions. It is puzzling, then, that depictions of imperial festivals often break with these pictorial conventions. How can we parse these images for material evidence of their creation and (re)use? A survey of ceremonial scenes in the flagship Shahjahani manuscript, the *Padshāhnāma*, reveals a series of design experiments which build upon developments in Mughal workshop practice. From processional scenes and princely weddings, to the Emperor's biannual weighing ceremony, I document the emergence of a visual idiom for these events which diverges from textual sources. This approach to pictorial space mimics the temporal experience of being in the presence of the Emperor, while engaging the viewer's faculties of memory and visualization. By examining these images of key ceremonies in the *Padshāhnāma*, this paper proposes a new reading of temporality and history in Shahjahani painting.

*The Sense of Difference:
Sunni Commemorations and Critique of 'Āshūrā' in Mughal Delhi*

Usman Hamid, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Religious Studies
Northwestern University

This presentation considers how the senses shed light on embodied dimensions of Sunni-Shi'i difference in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Mughal Delhi. In South Asian historiography, this period is noted for the increasing prominence of sectarian identities and contention. This presentation takes as its starting point of inquiry the commemoration 'Āshūrā'. Starting from the seventeenth century we see increasing references to public commemorations of the tenth of Muharram in Mughal North Indian cities both amongst Sunnis and Shi'as. At the same time, in their writings, Sunni Sufis and scholars also levied critiques against Shi'as for their observation of 'Āshūrā'. How do we make sense of this seeming contradiction? I argue that Sunni critiques might best be understood by examining how they discussed the body and its senses in the different forms of 'Āshūrā' commemorations by the two communities. The presentation proceeds in two turns. First, it examines the ways in which Sunnis understood the religious significance of the day and observed 'Āshūrā' with highly embodied ritual performances of their own. Second, it examines the Sunni criticism of Shi'i commemorations with a particular focus on material culture and the affective impact of their ritual performances. I focus on two writers: the Chishtī Sufi master Shāh Kalīm Allāh Shāhjahānābādī (1650–1729) and the Naqshbandī hadith and legal scholar Shāh 'Abd al- 'Azīz Dihlavī (1746–1824). While Mughal historiography often contrasts Chishtīs and Naqshbandīs, in my presentation, I use two writers to show that when it came to sectarian difference in the context of 'Āshūrā', they articulated a shared vision of the Sunni body, its sensorium, and its affective engagement through rituals of commemoration.

*Sensing the City's Misfortune:
Tracing the Audible Past in Shahr Ashob Poetry on Late Mughal Delhi, c. 1739-1857*

Gianni Sievers, Ph.D.
Postdoctoral Research Fellow
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Beginning with the invasion of Persian Emperor Nadir Shah in 1739, the Mughal imperial capital witnessed an unprecedented amount of violence, upheaval, and turmoil over the course of the eighteenth century that jeopardized many of the city's rich cultural practices. While poets like Mir Taqi Mir, Sauda, or Mir Hasan lamented a devastated and empty city, elite Muslim culture continued to flourish in Delhi until the nineteenth century. The anti-colonial Uprising of 1857, however, marks a watershed moment in the history of modern South Asia. Especially for India's Muslims, collectively punished for its outbreak by the British, the violence of the uprising and the destruction of the Mughal court became enshrined in the collective memory as traumas only surpassed by Partition in 1947. In this paper, I explore the role of sound and music in the nostalgic genre of *shahr ashob* poetry across two centuries as it transitioned from Persian to Urdu. Viewing the poet as an observer and listener, I use poetry as an archive for recovering the audible past of this period, tracing how the experience and memory of violence and destruction in Delhi changed from pre-colonial to colonial contexts. I argue that especially among Urdu poets like Shefta, Azurda, Dagh, Saqib, and others who increasingly adopted Shia aesthetics of mourning, sound and music assumed key functions in their emotional and poetic narratives of loss. Moreover, I contend that attention to "auditory culture" can disrupt the common military understanding of these traumatic events and instead point us toward equally important shifts in society, culture, and identity.

*The Trumpets Cried:
Sound and the Senses in Processions during the Thirteen Years' War (1593–1606)*

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During the Thirteen Years' War between the Austrian Habsburg and Ottoman empires, sound, ritual, and collective memory were used to leverage support for political and religious aims. Drawing on Jesuit records, archival sources, and travelers' accounts, I consider processions as signifiers of religious identity within Austrian and Ottoman regions. The juxtaposition of these sources reveals how cultural anxieties prompted sonic and multisensory strategies. German chronicler Hieronymus Ortel (1602) describes Habsburg jubilation in response to news of a victory in 1593 against the

Ottomans. The festivities included songs, trumpets, drums, and gunfire in Prague, and a procession with sung litanies in Vienna. Gesturing to the importance of penitential devotions for success in war, Archduke Matthias attributed other 1593 victories to the people's sighs, prayers, processions, and supplications. Ottoman and European accounts describe sensory aspects of circumcision festivals and annual surre processions that engaged the senses to communicate ideas and ideals of the state (Faroqhi 2000; Şahin 2018; Terzioğlu 1995; Wasti 2005). The chronicler Selânikî reports on Mehmed III's celebratory procession following the Ottoman victory at the Siege of Eger in 1596 (İpşirli 1989). Drums, brass and wind instruments, and musket fire exploded the acoustic horizon alongside the smells of incense, the slaughter of animals, the sights of colourful banners, the movement of the guild processions, and the sounds of children crying out. Processions, sonic events, and silence—bells, calls to prayers—projected religious identity and had the potential to unite or divide communities, perpetuate collective memories, or incite apostasy (Ergin [Macaraig] 2015; Gradeva 2010). Processions thus offer a window into the role of sound and the senses in negotiating power within multi-religious and multi-confessional communities *in tempore belli*.