

ISLAMCIV 162**Shī'ī Islam in Safavid Iran:
Religion, Culture, and Change**

Spring 2024

Lectures: Fridays, 09:45 am – 11:45 am

Museum of the Ancient Near East (NELC Department), Room # 201

Shahrad Shahvand

Alwaleed Bin Talal Postdoctoral Fellow in Islamic Studies,

Department of Near Eastern Languages & Civilizations,

6 Divinity Ave., Room #101, Cambridge, MA 02138

shs228@mail.harvard.edu

Office hours: Fridays, 4 pm–6 pm or by appointment

Course description: The purpose of this course is to introduce students to various aspects of the religious history of Iran during one of its most crucial periods, the rise of the Safavid Empire in the early sixteenth century. The course explores a wide range of topics including conversion, polemics, sectarian rituals and practices, pilgrimage, the religious education of scholars, their legal debates, as well as the relationship between Shī'ism, Sufism, and philosophy, as well as its manifestation in literature and art/architecture. It is intended for graduate students (and advanced undergraduates) in Islamic studies, Iranian Studies, Ottoman and Safavid history, Middle Eastern Studies, and Shī'ī Studies.

The course will be conducted through a combination of lectures and class discussions. This course is tailored for graduate students, as well as advanced undergraduates, who are specializing in Islamic Studies, Shī'ī Studies, Iranian Studies, Ottoman and Safavid Studies. It is also ideal for those keen on exploring the history of religion and social transitions in the early modern Middle and Near East. This course will be offered only once, in Spring 2024. I will provide a presentation at the beginning of each weekly class to introduce the major themes. Following that, we will engage in a discussion about the assigned readings.

Grades will be calculated based on the following activities and assignments:

1. Weekly Readings and Reflections (50%): You are expected to review the weekly readings and reflect upon them, focusing particularly on a set of major questions that I will post on the Canvas site each week. Your weekly responses, which should be no more than two pages (or 500 words), will account for 50% of your final grade. **Due date: Every Thursday at 5 pm (starting from Week 2).**

2. Midterm Short Essay/Book Review (15%): For the midterm, you are required to write a short essay or a book review (1,500 words), which will contribute 20% of your final grade. This essay can be an enhanced version of one of your weekly reflections if you choose. **Due date: Friday, March 8th at 11:59 pm.**

3. Final Short Essay (20%): A comprehensive short essay (2,500 to 3,000 words), is to be submitted at the end of the term. This assignment will contribute 20% to your final grade. You are encouraged to select your essay topic by the midpoint of the semester, following a consultation with me. **Due date: Friday, May 3rd at 11:59 pm.**

4. Class Participation: %15.

Weekly Schedules

Week 1 (Friday, Jan. 26): Introducing the Safavid Dynasty

- Rudi Matthee, "Safavid Dynasty," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/safavids>, 25 pages.
- Rudi Matthee, "The Idea of Iran in the Safavid Period: Dynastic Pre-eminence and Urban Pride," in *Safavid Persia in the Age of Empires: The Idea of Iran Vol. 10*, edited by Charles Melville, (London: I. B. Tauris & Company, Limited, 2021), 81–103.

Week 2 (Friday, Feb. 2): How Did a "Sunni" Sufi Order Establish a Shī'ī State?

- Ayşe Baltacıoğlu-Brammer, "The Emergence of the Safavids as a Mystical Order and Their Subsequent Rise to Power in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," in *The Safavid World*, edited by Rudi Matthee (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY : Routledge, 2021), 15–36.
- Riza Yildirim, "The Rise of the Safavids as a Political Dynasty: The Revolution of Shāh Esmā'ī I, the Founder of the Safavid State," in *The Safavid World*, 56–76.
- Ali Anooshahr, "The Rise of the Safavids According to Their Old Veterans: Amini Haravi's Futuhat-e Shahi," *Iranian Studies* 48, no. 2 (2015): 249–67.

Week 3 (Friday, Feb 9): Did the Safavids Convert Persia to Shī'ism? How?

- Rula J. Abisaab, "Sufi Regalia and Legal Banners: The Safavids and the Emigré Arab Jurists," in *Converting Persia: Religion and Power in the Safavid Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 7–30.
- Devin J. Stewart, "Notes on the Migration of 'Āmilī Scholars to Safavid Iran," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 55, no. 2 (1996): 81–103, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/373800>.
- Alberto Tiburcio, "The Profile of a Convert in Safavid Iran," in *Muslim-Christian Polemics in Safavid Iran* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 9–37, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctv136c4x1.5>.

Week 4 (Friday, Feb. 16): Promoting Shī'ī Rituals and Sectarian Practices

- Jean Calmard, "Shi'i rituals and power: the consolidation of Safavid Shi'ism folklore and popular religion," in *Safavid Persia: The History and Politics of an Islamic Society* (London, I. B. Tauris, 1996), 139–190.
- Babak Rahimi, "A History of (Safavid) Muharram Rituals," in *Theater State and the Formation of Early Modern Public Sphere in Iran* (Boston: Brill, 2012): 199–201, 216–34.
- Rosemary Stanfield-Johnson, "Sunni Survival in Safavid Iran: Anti-Sunni Activities during the Reign of Tahmasp I," *Iranian Studies* 27, no. 1/4 (1994): 123–33, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4310889>.
- Rosemary Stanfield-Johnson, "The Tabarra'īyan and the Early Safavids," *Iranian Studies* 37, no. 1 (2004): 47–71, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4311591>.

Week 5 (Friday, Feb. 23): Waqf, Shī'ī Shrines, and Pilgrimage

- Nozhat Ahmadi, "Waqf in the Safavid period," in *The Safavid World*, 374–86.
- Selim Guengoeruerler, "Ottoman Archival Documents on the Shrines of Karbala, Najaf, and the Hejaz (1660s-1720s): Endowment Wars, the Spoils System, and Iranian Pilgrims," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 64, no. 7 (2021): 897–919, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685209-12341557>.
- May Farhat, "Shi'i Piety and Dynastic Legitimacy: Mashhad Under the Early Safavid Shahs," *Iranian Studies* 47, no. 2 (2014): 201–16, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00210862.2013.860323>.
- Charles P Melville "Shah 'Abbas and the pilgrimage to Mashhad," *Safavid Persia*, edited by Charles Melville, *Pembroke Papers* 4 (1996): 191–229.

Week 6 (Friday, Mar. 1): Religious Education of a Shī'ī Scholar

- Maryam Moazzen, "The Safavid Curriculum: Conflicting Visions, Contested Triumphs," in *Formation of a Religious Landscape: Shi'i Higher Learning in Safavid Iran*. (Boston & Leiden: Brill, 2018), 126–162.

- Maryam Moazzen, "Engagement with Religious Knowledge: Dialogical and Hermeneutical Modes of Transmission," in *Formation of a Religious Landscape: Shi'i Higher Learning in Safavid Iran*. (Boston & Leiden: Brill, 2018), 163–211.

Week 7 (Friday, Mar. 8): Shī'ī Mujtahids, the Safavid Court, and Their Legal Disputes

- Saïd Amir Arjomand, "The Clerical Estate and the Emergence of a Shi'ite Hierocracy in Šafavid Iran," in *Sociology of Shi'ite Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 207–46, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004326279_013
- Devin J. Stewart, "Polemics and patronage in Safavid Iran: The debate on Friday prayer during the reign of Shah Tahmasb," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 72, no. 3 (2009): 425–57, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0041977X09990024>.
- Willem Floor, "The "šadr" or Head of the Safavid Religious Administration, Judiciary and Endowments and Other Members of the Religious Institution." *Zeitschrift Der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, vol. 150, no. 2, 2000, pp. 461–500.
- Devin J. Stewart, "Of Poetry and Patronage: A Scholar's Lament by Ḥusayn b. 'Abd al-Šamad al-Āmili (d. 984/1576)." *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 143, no. 1, (2023): 21–34 (optional)

Spring Break (from Sat. March 9th to Sun. March 17th)

Week 8 (Friday, Mar. 22): Opposition to *Ijtihād*?: Akhbārism vs. Uṣūlī Shī'ism

- Robert Gleave, "The Akhbari-Usuli Dispute And The Early "Akhbari" School," in *Scripturalist Islam: The History and Doctrines of the Akhbārī Shī'ī School* (Boston & Leiden: Brill, 2007), 1–30.
- Robert Gleave, "Defining the Akhbari-Usuli Conflict," in *Scripturalist Islam: The History and Doctrines of the Akhbārī Shī'ī School* (Boston & Leiden: Brill, 2007), 177–215.
- Andrew J. Newman, "The Nature of the Akhbārī/Uṣūlī Dispute in Late Šafawid Iran. Part 1: 'Abdallāh al-Samāhijī's "Munyat al-Mumārīsīn." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London 55, no. 1 (1992): 22–24, 38–51, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/620475>.
- Andrew J. Newman, "The Nature of the Akhbārī/Uṣūlī Dispute in Late Šafawid Iran, Part 2: The Conflict Reassessed," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 55, no. 2 (1992): 250–61, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0041977X00004602>.
- Robert Gleave, "Muhammad Taqī al-Majlisi and Safavid Shi'ism: Akhbarism and Anti-sunni Polemic During the Reigns of Shah 'Abbas the Great and Shah Safi," *Iran* 55, no. 1 (2017): 24–34, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/05786967.2016.1277100> (optional)

Week 9 (Friday, Mar.29): Sufism: Continuity or Decline?

- Ata Anzali, "The Safavid Opposition to Sufism," in *"Mysticism" in Iran: The Safavid Roots of a Modern Concept* (University of South Carolina Press, 2017), 24–68.
- Ata Anzali, "Opposition to Sufism in Safavid Iran: A Debate Between Mulla Muhammad-Tahir Qummi and Mulla Muhammad-Taqi Majlisi," in *The Empires of the Near East and India* (Columbia University Press, 2019), 128–49.
- Andrew J. Newman, "Sufism and the Safavids in Iran A further challenge to "Decline"," in *Routledge Handbook on Sufism*, edited by Llyod Ridgeon (New York : Routledge, 2020), 370–86.

Week 10 (Friday, Apr. 5): Towards a Shī'ī Philosophy?

- Sajjad Rizvi, "The Many Faces of Philosophy in the Safavid Age," in *The Empires of the Near East and India*, 305–318, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7312/khaf17436-029>
- Janis Esots, *Patterns of Wisdom in Safavid Iran: the Philosophical School of Isfahan and the Gnostic of Shiraz* (London: I. B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2021), 1–14 & 15–68.

Week 11 (Friday, Apr.12): Shī'ī Literature and Devotion to the Imāms

- Amelia Gallagher, "Shah Isma'il's Poetry in the Silsilat al-Nasab-i Safawiyya," *Iranian Studies* 44, no. 6 (2011): 895–911, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00210862.2011.570527>
- Jean Calmard, "Popular Literature Under the Safavids," in *Society and Culture in the Early Modern Middle East* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 315–339.
- Paul Losensky, "MOHTAŠAM KĀŠĀNI," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2014, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/mohtasham-kashani>.
- Paul Losensky, "Selections from the Poetry of Muhtasham Kashani," in *The Empires of the Near East and India*, 406–27, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7312/khaf17436-037>

Week 12 (Friday, Apr. 19): Incorporating Shī'is Notions into Art and Architecture

Guest Speaker: Sarah Molina, Doctoral Candidate in History of Art and Architecture, Harvard University

- Oleg Grabar, "Are there Shi'i forms of art?" in *People of the Prophet's House: artistic and ritual expressions of Shi'i Islam*, ed. by Fahmida Suleman (London : Azimuth Editions in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2015), 30–39.
- Kishwar Rizvi, "The Incarnate Shrine: Commemorating the cult of Shi'i imams in Safavid Iran," in *Saints and Sacred Matter: The cult of relics in Byzantium and beyond*, ed. by Cynthia Hahn and Holger Klein, (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2015), 289–307.

- Christiane Gruber, “When Nubuvvat Encounters Valāyat: Safavid Paintings of the Prophet Mohammad’s Mi‘rāj, c. 1500–50,” in *The Art and Material Culture of Iranian Shi’ism: Iconography and Religious Devotion in Shi’i Islam*, ed. by P.M. Keshavjee (London: I.B.Tauris, 2012), 46–73, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9780755610709.0011>
- Farshid Emami, “Religious Architecture of Safavid Iran,” in *The Religious Architecture of Islam*, Vol. 1, Asia and Australia, eds. Hasan-Uddin Khan and Kathryn Blair Moore (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 256–73. (optional)

Week 13 (Friday, Apr. 26): No class. The instructor will be available during regular class hours for office hours, specifically to address questions related to the final essay.