



**“LISTEN TO THE FLUTE”:
TIMURID MUSIC AND ITS TRANSMISSIONS
ACROSS THE PERSIANATE WORLD**

Convened by: Persian Manuscripts Association

Hosted by: SOAS, University of London

Dates: 20 September 2025 – 21 September 2025

Conference Overview

The Persian Manuscripts Association (PMA) is pleased to announce its second international conference on Persian Studies, titled **"Listen to the Flute: Timurid Music and its Transmissions Across the Persianate World."**

This interdisciplinary event will focus on the intricate and complex history of musical exchange, patronage, and practice within the Persianate world, with a particular focus on the Timurid period (15th century) and its enduring influence during the following centuries in Safavid Iran, Ottoman Anatolia, Mughal India, and Shaybanid Transoxiana.

The Timurid era, particularly under the patronage of the courts in Herat, Tabriz, and Samarqand, marked a time of flourishing for Persian musical traditions. With the support of Timurid rulers, Persian music underwent significant transformations, evidenced by treatises on music theory, detailed descriptions of courtly musical life, and dynamic interactions between musicians and theorists. This period of unprecedented artistic and intellectual exchange not only shaped and enriched Persian music, but also had profound implications for the broader musical cultures of the region.

For the first time, this conference will convene leading scholars in the field to explore the historical, social, and political contexts that shaped musical practices across the Persianate world. It will examine the evolution of music in the courts and urban centres of Iran, Central Asia, the Ottoman Empire, and Mughal India. Additionally, the conference will delve into the sociocultural impact of music, addressing its theoretical foundations, performance traditions, and the patronage systems that sustained and transformed the musical landscape.

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this conference is to cultivate a broader multidisciplinary discourse among musicologists, historians, philosophers, literary scholars, theologians, and art historians, with the goal of facilitating a comprehensive exploration of musical traditions, practices, and institutions in the Persianate world. This scholarly aspired to foster dialogue regarding the interconnections between music and the overarching cultural and political developments during the Timurid, Safavid, Ottoman, and Mughal periods. Key areas of exploration include:

- **Musical Patronage and Courtly Life:** A central focus will be on the roles of royal patrons and courtly institutions in the promotion and preservation of music, particularly within the major courts of Samarqand, Herat, Tabriz, Isfahan, Istanbul, Delhi, and Agra. The conference will explore the influence of prominent patrons on the development of musical traditions, the establishment of musical institutions, and the cultivation of courtly repertoires.
- **Interregional Musical Exchange:** Another crucial aspect of the conference will be the cross-cultural exchange between Persianate musical traditions and those of the Ottoman Empire, Mughal India, and other regions of the Islamic world. We will investigate how these interactions shaped musical forms, modal systems, and rhythmic structures, with particular attention to the reciprocal influence between Persian, Turkish, Arabic, and Indic musical practices.
- **Music Theory and Musical Texts:** The theoretical foundations of Persianate music, particularly its modal systems, will be examined through key treatises, such as those by ‘Abd al-Qādir Marāghī, ‘Alīshāh b. Būka Awbahī, Najm al-Dīn Kawkabī Bukhārī and Bāqiyā Nā’īnī. We will explore how these treatises addressed the nature of melodic development, melodic modes, rhythmic cycles, and the roles of improvisation and composition in Persianate musical traditions.
- **The Musician's Role in Society:** A central question for this conference is the social organisation of musicians within the Persianate world. How were musicians trained, and how did they interact with the broader intellectual and artistic communities? What was the status of musicians at court, and what role did music play in shaping social hierarchies and cultural identities?
- **Performance Practices:** In addition to theoretical analysis, we will explore the performance contexts of Persianate music, investigating how music was performed in different settings—be it at courtly banquets, in religious rituals, or in informal gatherings. The conference will also consider the relationship between vocal and instrumental music, as well as the role of musical ensembles in shaping performance styles.
- **Instruments and Material Culture:** The material culture of Persianate music, including the **instruments** used in various settings, such as Persian painting and manuscript illustrations will also be a key focus.

Key Themes and Topics

We invite submissions that engage with any of the following themes:

1. **Patronage and Court Music:**
 - The role of patrons in the development of musical cultures.
 - The establishment of musical institutions in Persianate courts.

- Notable patrons, including Timurid, Safavid, Mughal, and Ottoman rulers, and their contributions to the arts.
2. **The Migration and Exchange of Musicians:**
- The movement of musicians between courts and their influence on musical practices.
 - The flow of musical knowledge across the Persianate world and into Europe.
3. **Music and Cultural Relations:**
- The influence of Persian music on Ottoman and Mughal courts.
 - The impact of Iranian music on the cultural and political life of the Ottoman and Mughal Empires.
 - The interaction between Persian music and other traditions, such as Central Asian and Indian musical norms.
4. **Musical Texts and Theory:**
- The study of key musical treatises and their impact on the transmission of musical knowledge.
 - Analysis of song-text collections, theoretical works, and historical texts related to Persianate music.
 - The evolution of the *maqām* system and the development of music theory.
5. **Musical Instruments and Material Culture:**
- The construction, use, and significance of musical instruments in the Persianate world.
6. **Performance Practices and Genres:**
- The evolution of musical genres and forms of composition.
 - The roles of vocal and instrumental music in Persianate performance settings.
 - Courtly music and Sufi music: Exploring their intersection in religious and social contexts.
7. **Rhythmic and Modal Systems:**
- The development of rhythmic structures in Persianate music.
 - The structure and evolution of modal systems and rhythmic cycles (e.g., *maqām* and *oṣul*).
 - The role of modulation and improvisation in performance practices.

Conference Goals

The primary objective of this conference is to promote a multidisciplinary dialogue among scholars and researchers to deepen our understanding of the musical heritage of the Persianate world. We seek to explore the intersection of music with philosophy, mysticism, theology, and literature, emphasising how music functioned as both an art form and a cultural discourse within the Persianate context. By examining the connections between performance practices, social structures, and intellectual traditions, this conference will illuminate the complexity and depth of musical life in the Persianate world.

We invite contributions that address not only the musical texts and theories, but also the social and political roles that music played across time and space. We hope to bring together scholars from various fields to engage with the dynamic and evolving musical traditions of the Persianate world, from the courts of Herat to the cities of Istanbul, Bukhara, and Delhi.

Submission Guidelines

We invite abstracts for individual papers, panels, and workshops on topics related to the themes outlined above. All proposals should include:

- A paper title and a 300-word abstract.
- A short biography (150 words) detailing relevant academic and professional background.
- A statement of how your paper contributes to the conference themes and objectives.

Proposals should be submitted to info@persianmanuscripts.org no later than **April 30, 2025**. Notifications of acceptance will be sent by May 31, 2025.

We look forward to welcoming scholars, musicians, and cultural historians for a vibrant exchange of ideas and research on the fascinating musical traditions of the Persianate world.



Persian Manuscripts Association