
Christophe Werner
Bringing together, on the one hand, the fields of Persian letters, rhetoric and the art of *inšā* and, on the other, the multiple expressions of Safavid dynastic legitimacy, this detailed study offers us a fascinating new view of the cultural landscape of the early Safavid realm. Different layers of Safavid claims to legitimacy contain references to pre-Islamic Iran’s mythical history, the prophetic cycle of Abrahamic religions, and Imamite and Alide hagiographies, not to mention allusions to Turko-Mongol traditions of kingship and nobility. To understand these shifting legitimacies and the underlying “sixteenth-century Safavid ideology”, Mitchell focuses on state chancelleries, looking for evidence of such shifts in the corpus of diplomatic correspondence, a treasure of prose and poetic writings. A new appreciation of the literary output of Safavid chancelleries leads to a fresh look at the traditions of Persian-Islamic rhetoric (*adab*, *balāḡat* and *tarassul*). This positive perspective also influences the perception of Safavid historiography. Unlike traditional Orientalist scholars, we should not see the use of rhetorical techniques as examples of a manneristic style but, instead, as a coded form of expression, a discourse by specialists connected to the past in an expanding imperial court.

This book, its time frame running from Šāh Ismā’īl to the first decade of Šāh ‘Abbās’ reign, is divided chronologically into four major chapters where the history of events,
factual changes in administrative structures and developments in the broader fields of politics and religion are interwoven with comments on specific documents and writings: *fatḥ-nāmas*, handbooks of *inšā* (such as Nūrbaṭṣī’s ‘Ālam-ārā-yi inšā or Kašīfī’s *Maṯzan al-inšā*), diplomatic correspondence, decrees from epistolary collections and major chronicles of the time. It is fascinating how much we can learn from, for example, the *taʿziya-nāma* written by ‘Abdī Beg Širāzī as a letter of condolence to the Ottoman sultan Murād III on the death of his father. Another worthwhile reading of Mitchell’s book is as an analysis of the first century of Safavid rule that incorporates the most recent discussions and findings of research. This book will become a classic in the field.

AUTHORS

**CHRISTOPHE WERNER**

Philipps-Universität, Marburg