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## Guest Editor's Note

Over seven years ago, when the decision was made to form a scholarly association concentrating on the study of the Qajar era, arguments for why not to proceed with the idea were plentiful, even in the minds of the original founders. Seven years hence, the International Qajar Studies Association (IQSA) has come into its own, and though still a young association with all the attendant challenges that go with this newness, IQSA has been able to establish itself as an audible voice in the chorus of scholarly organizations dedicated to Iranian Studies.

The Qajar era still evokes strong feelings in the Iranian psyche, not least because three living generations of Iranians were molded in the Pahlavi era, the period that succeeded that of the Qajars. In 1998, Dr. Layla S. Diba organized an exhibition and a series of symposia on the Qajar era at the Brooklyn Museum of Art and at New York University (NYU). At one of the symposia held at NYU, I had occasion to thank Prof. Abbas Amanat for his balanced, and indeed positive, portrayal of the Qajars and the Qajar era, and asked him what the reason behind this change of portrayal was and what he thought made this change possible. One of the guiding spirits of the gatherings in New York and of Iranian Studies in general, Prof. Ehsan Yarshater answered for him that the reason was "distance."

Prof. Yarshater indeed pointed to a profound watershed, and his answer was in no small part responsible for the consolidation of the will on our part to form an association dedicated more specifically to the study of an era that had been neglected and distorted for far too long, and thus began an effort that has borne fruit for seven years now.

The conferences organized by the International Qajar Studies Association (IQSA) have ranged from focus on the themes of photography; court attire and dress; health, beauty, and hygiene; harems; to the weightier themes of war and peace, and that of diplomatic relations and travelogues (the theme of our 2007 conference in Paris in conjunction with the Fondation Napoleon marking the bicentennial anniversary of the Gardane mission to Persia.) As a unique feature of our association, for each conference, we have also produced a journal, *Qajar Studies*, now in its seventh year, featuring many of the articles presented at that conference, thus making the proceedings of the conference available to a larger audience instantly as a catalogue cum memento of what they are participating in then and there. The ability to do this is in no small part due to the Herculean efforts of our editor-in-chief and publisher Ferydoun Barjesteh, whose work speaks for itself and need not be gainsaid here.

After a very successful conference entitled "War and Peace in the Qajar Era" at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge in 2005, the International Qajar Studies

Association (IQSA) wished to focus on a “lighter” topic for its annual conference in 2006 while still being mindful of the importance of that year for Iran and the Iranian experience. On 2 and 3 June 2006, in co-operation with our partners, Profs. Bernard Hourcade and Philip Huysse of the Mondes Iranien et Indien (CNRS, Université Paris III, INALCO, EPHE) who co-hosted our conference, and the kind financial support of the Soudavar Foundation in the name of Massoumeh-ol-Moluk Amir-Alai (Soudavar), IQSA held its sixth annual conference at the Institut National d’Histoire de l’Art in Paris on the theme of “Entertainment in Qajar Persia.”

The choice of the theme of the conference was important as no comprehensive study of entertainment in the Qajar era had been undertaken yet, and, as some of the presentations showed, much misunderstanding and misinformation on the subject remained. The conference was divided into four different sections: (a) Court and Official Entertainment; (b) Popular Entertainment; (c) The Written Word; and (d) The Arts.

Seventeen papers were presented at the two-day conference, with keynote speeches on Friday by Dr. Rudi Matthee and memorably on Saturday by Dr. Homa Katouzian, who regaled the audience with his selections of Iraj Mirza’s beautiful poetry in the original Persian. The organizers of the conference were also fortunate to be able to host two of the deans of Iranian Studies, Prof. Peter Chelkowski of New York University and Prof. Jean Calmard of the University of Paris, who presented on the theme of *ta’ziyeh*. Indeed, the conference was a feast for the eyes as well as the ears, and the written medium does not fully do justice to the atmosphere and ambiance created by the presenters as a whole, also exemplified movingly at the close of the conference by the playing of an original recording of a musical performance from the Qajar era by Prof. Ameneh Yousefzadeh to a stunned audience.

Had I had my wish, more of the unique papers of the conference would have been available for this edition of *Iranian Studies* to convey to its readership a truer flavor of the proceedings of the conference. As it is, these selections provide only a nosegay (*golchin*) with some notable roses and a thistle in between, but a sufficient taste of what was indeed achieved in these two days. My heartfelt thanks and appreciation go to Dr. Homa Katouzian who graciously offered to provide space in *Iranian Studies* for these proceedings. He is indeed a gentleman, a scholar, and a wonderful friend to boot.