

ISIS Announcement

Saidi-Sirjani Book Awards for 2006

The Saidi-Sirjani Book Awards Committee of the International Society for Iranian Studies (ISIS) has announced that the winner of its First Prize for 2006 is Rudi Matthee (University of Delaware). Honorable Mentions were also granted by the Committee to works by Etienne de la Vaissiere (ENS Laboratoire d'Archeologie) and by David Roxburgh (Harvard University).

The Saidi-Sirjani Book Award, which is granted biennially by ISIS, was established in 1995 for the purpose of encouraging scholarship in the field of Iranian Studies, as well as to honor the memory of Ali-Akbar Saidi-Sirjani (1931–1994), the noted Iranian historian, literary critic, and author, in appreciation for his scholarship, his courage, and his indefatigable struggle for freedom of expression.

Works qualifying for the prize will consist of (a) original studies or syntheses in Persian, English, and European languages of a topic in the Iranian field; (b) critical editions of significant texts in an Iranian language; and (c) translations from an Iranian language, only if accompanied by scholarly annotations requiring extensive research. Works of fiction and poetry, and edited collections are excluded. To be considered for the prize, works should be of monograph length and published by a recognized publishing house. The Award currently carries a cash stipend of \$2,000 for the First Prize and \$500 for each of two Honorable Mentions.

The current members of the Saidi-Sirjani Book Award Committee are: Abbas Amanat (Yale University), Sheila Blair (Boston College), Farhad Daftary (Institute of Ismaili Studies, London), Paul Losensky (Indiana University), Charles P. Melville (University of Cambridge), and P. Oktor Skjaervo (Harvard University). The Committee is chaired by Ali Banuazizi (Boston College).

The award citations for the three selected works were as follows:

First prize

Rudi Matthee, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Drugs and Stimulants in Iranian History, 1500–1900* (Princeton University Press, 2005).

This is an important and original study of the use and abuse of wine, opium, tobacco, coffee and tea in Iran since the Safavid era looking at patterns and cultures of consumption, socio-economic contexts as well as production and trade, diversity, and widespread use among the elite and the commoners, and gradual changes in habits over a period of four centuries. It is a well-researched, richly detailed and eloquently written study based on excellent

primary sources in Persian and in a wide range of European languages. It fills a visible gap not only in early modern and modern Iranian history but in the whole field of social history that concerns itself with stimulants and their place in creating and maintaining the public space in taverns and coffeehouses. It clearly demonstrates how wine-drinking and other Persian cultural habits persisted, and often flourished, despite religious stigma and prohibitions at times to demonstrate nonconformity.

Honorable mentions (in alphabetical order)

1. David J. Roxburgh. *The Persian Album 1400–1600: From Dispersal to Collection*. Yale University Press: New Haven and London: 2005. Pp. 379 + 174 illustrations, many in color.

This handsomely produced monograph is a detailed “archeological” examination of the scrapbook album or *muraqqa'*, a new form of collecting that became popular during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when Iran was under the rule of the Timurids and the Safavids. These albums comprise some of the most lavish books produced in the period, with numerous calligraphies, paintings and drawings mounted on large sheets of paper, decorated with splendid illumination, and set within brilliantly colored margins. Although all were intended to preserve and display the works collected within them, the individual albums differ in content and visual effect. By deconstructing seven of the most famous examples through close codicological examination, Roxburgh illuminates the changing visual world and the development of a history of art during these two centuries when the arts of Iran, notably the arts of the book, flourished as never before.

2. Étienne de la Vaissière, *Histoire des marchands sogdiens*, 2nd ed., Bibliothèque de l'Institut des hautes études chinoises XXXII, Paris, 2004, 377 p., ill., maps. (Transl. by James Ward: *Sogdian Traders. A history*, Handbuch der Orientalistik VIII: *Central Asia*, 10: Sogdian traders, Leiden and Boston, 2005, 406 p., ill., maps).

This is the first scholarly synthesis of the vast amount of knowledge about the history of the Silk Road and the peoples inhabiting it or traveling on it accumulated since the great discoveries of the early 20th century. The presentation is based on all the available archeological and textual source material. It is systematic, well organized, comprehensive, and eminently readable. The author is a historian by training, but is well versed in questions of archeology, philology, sinology, etc., although he enlisted an impressive array of specialists in these other fields to check the facts presented. The expertise required—aside from the obvious—ranges from (Eng. p. 5): “interpretation of Old Persian mineralogical terms of the 6th century BCE to the meaning of certain toponyms in the narrative of a Franciscan of the 13th century, meanwhile including the determination of the geographic origin of travelers to Nishapur in the 9th century, and

the borrowings made by Chinese geographical texts over the centuries.” The result is a well-written expose of an extremely complex issue, which will, no doubt, remain a major reference work for the study of the Iranians on the Silk Road, their history, society, religions, and arts. The need for such a synthesis is amply proved by the fact that the 1st edition was rapidly sold out. It was also widely reviewed, and any additional information was incorporated in the 2nd edition.