A Library Worthy of a Prince: The Collection of Iʿtiżād al-Salṭana Qajar at the Sipahsālār Library

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Abstract

In this article we scrutinize the process of founding of one of the prominent manuscript libraries in the Middle East, the Sipahsālār library in Tehran, in particular the circumstances of the creation of an endowment (*waqf*) for it, and the purchase of a massive private library of the Qajar prince Iʿtiżād al-Salṭana, by the *waqf* of the library. We will also discuss efforts to catalogue and organize the collections housed in the library, as it continued to grow. To draw a rudimentary picture of the make up of the collection and the special material it holds, we briefly introduce 25 manuscripts in the libray, categorized into different groups, to highlight certain features of the princely collection.

Keywords: Library, Manuscript, Sipahsālār, Qajar, Iʿtiżād al-Salṭana, Waqf, Endowment, Islamic,

Introduction

One of the most underappreciated collections of Manuscripts and Lithographs in Iran remains the collection of the Sipahsālār library (or the Nāṣirī library, now Kitābkhāna-yi Madrasa-yi ʿĀlī-yi Shahīd Muṭahharī). Although considerably smaller in the number of holdings, it may be considered one of the seven most important manuscript libraries in Iran, together with Kitābkhāna-yi Āstān-i Quds, Millī, Malik, Marʿashī, Majlis-i Shūrā, and Dānishgāh Tehran. This is due to the fact that it holds numerous rare treasures, as well as the particular manner in which the library was put together and developed, as will be explained here.

Founded in 1880 via an endowment (*Waqf*) of the prominent Qajar statesman Mīrzā Ḥusayn Khān Qazvīnī, Sipahsālār, and later supervised by his brother Mīrzā Yaḥyā Khān Mushīr al-Dawla, the library is located on the grounds of the mosque and seminary school[1] in Bahāristān, in Tehran, founded by the same *Waqf*.[2] Apart from the impressive architectural features and inscription of the mosque and the madrasa of Sipahsālār,[3] which deserve a separate study, its unique collection of manuscripts and rare lithographs exhibits certain distinctive features that would be of interest both

1 The status of the *madrasa* of Sipahsālār, and whether it qualifies as a "seminary school" is somewhat debatable. It was originally founded to be a revised or perhaps "modernized" version of a traditional Shi'i madrasa, as reflected in its common designation as *Madrasa-yi ʿAlī*. In practice, the identity of the madrasa has evolved through time, due to a number of temporary closures and changes in stewardship. See, e.g. Munzavī, vol. 3, pp. 5-7.

2 Currently, in its latest reincarnation, the madrasa is listed as a special non-governmental university admitting students for majors in 'Religious Sciences' such as Islamic Law, Jurisprudence, and Islamic Philosophy. It has also expanded to include a few regional campuses across Iran.

3 For a summary assessment of the architectural features see Saḥāb pp. 33-50. for a list and summary assessment of the inscriptions see Mahjūr and ʿAlīʾī, "Barrasī-yi Katībahā-yi Masjid-Madrasa-yi Shahīd Muṭahharī," *Hunarhā-yi Zībā* **3**, No. 48 (2011), pp. 49-58.

to scholars of Pre-modern Persian and Arabic and Islamic learning in Iran, as well as more broadly to historians of books and libraries as objects and institutions.

Even cataloguing this impressive collection was a task of such scholarly complexity and value, that it was completed only through efforts of two generations of distinguished scholars of book history and islamic manuscripts, and via several independent projects. Most notably, the first topical catalogue was created by Żiyāʾ al-Dīn Ḥadāʾiq, better known as Ibn Yūsuf Shīrāzī, in two volumes, in the 1930s, and a first complete catalogue which was produced only much later, by Muḥammad Taqī Dānishpazhūh and ʿAlīnaqī Munzavī in the 1970s. While the work of Dānishpazhūh and Munzavī was independent of ibn Yūsuf Shīrāzī, and of a larger scope, paying homage to their predecessor, they published their catalogue in three volumes, as volumes three to five, as an addendum to the original list of Shīrāzī. At the time of this study, some bibliographical information may be accessed via an online portal,[4] though the portal remains incomplete, both in terms of the entries it covers, as well as information available on each entry.[5]
The manuscripts holdings of the library, just shy of 9,000 titles in Arabic and Persian currently,[6] although smaller than other major collections in Iran (such as the six listed above), hosts numerous rare treasures, thanks to the manner in which it was put together.

4 Accessible via the webpage of the university at motahari.ac.ir. (last accessed Aug 14, 2025).
5 A typical electronic "fiche" on the university web portal lists information such as call number, original reference number, genre, title, author, scribe, and language. For many entries one or several of the fields are left blank
6 For the purpose of this study we have limited the scope to manuscript holdings exclusively. For lithographs, cf the publication prepared by Yikka-Zāriʿ„ *Fihsrist-i Kitābhā-yi Chāp-i Sangi wa Surbī-yi Kitābkhāna-yi Madrasa-yi ʿĀlī-yi Sipahsālār*, Tehran: Intishārāt-i Madrasa-yi Shahīd Muṭahharī, 2007.

The initial special acquisitions by its founders, together with subsequent donations and provisioned later acquisitions have created a composition of titles and copies which is unique in many aspects, such as topics covered, stylistic features, marginalia, or ownership notes, with an enormous cultural impact. In particular, due to proximity of the founders of the library to the Qajar court, as well as notable scholars and bibliophiles of the period who frequented elite circles connected to the court, the library features a unique composition. As the progenitors were in a position to acquire rare collections curated by the elite of the Qajar society, a close study of the collection gives us a window into the reading and collecting habits of the learned elite of the Qajar society.

The library continued to grow per stipulation of its endowment deed (*Waqfnāma*) after the dissolution of Qajar court and even after the end of the Pahlavi period. This was achieved through a number of donations and purchase of valuable personal collections by caretakers of the library. The single largest acquisition and the one collection that is responsible for the distinctive features of the Sipahsālār library, was the purchase of the personal library of the influential Qajar era scholar and statesman, and famous bibliophile, ʿAlīqulī Mīrzā Iʿtiżād al-Salṭāna, the son of Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shah and the first Minister of the Sciences (*Vazīr-i ʿUlūm*) in Iran. In this article we will briefly describe the circumstances of the founding of the library by Mīrzā Ḥusayn khan Sipahsālār, and the role his associate, Iʿtiżād al-Salṭana Qajar, in this endeavor. We will further scrutinize certain aspects of this library which contribute to its unique features, from its founding and early development, to efforts to create a scholarly catalogue of it. In the end some notable holdings in this collection will be briefly introduced.

1. ʿAlīqulī Mīrzā Iʿtiżād al-Salṭana: Qajar Prince and Bibliophile

The career of ʿAlīqulī Mīrzā Iʿtiżād al-Salṭana is a remarkable case of the life of a learned nobleman in a society in the throes of transition to modernity in late Qajar Iran. He was born to an Armenian concubine from Tbilisi at the harem of the Iranian monarch Fatḫ-ʿAlī Shah Qajar.[7] As expected, he received the proper education for a prince at the court, which at the time consisted of a full course of studies in the classical tradition of pre-modern Islamic societies, especially in Iran, typically under the supervision of a personal tutor (in his case Mīrzā Naẓar-ʿAlī Ḥakīmbāshī).[8]

ʿAlīqulī Mīrzā was fully educated in this tradition, though throughout this career he came increasingly in more contact with the modern sciences, or "the European sciences" and grew a fondness for it. A classical education at the time, as standardized in the late Safavid madrasa tradition, would cover anything from the Religious Sciences (Quran, Tafsir, Hadith, Fiqh, etc) to the Intellectual Sciences (such as Philosophy in the Avicenna tradition, or Mathematics defined as the four subjects of the quadrivium, including Astronomy). He excelled in his education and was appointed, already in his youth, as the chief secretary or agent

7 For information on the life and career of ʿAlīqulī Mīrzā, cf two substantive articles by Abbas Amanat. "EʿTEŻĀD-AL-SALṬANA, ʿALĪQOLĪ MĪRZĀ" *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, and Sayyid ʿAlī Āl-dāvūd, "Iʿtiżād al-Salṭana," *Dāyirat al-Maʿārif-i Buzurg-i Islāmi*. While the two articles draw on the same vast body of sources, they occasionally give conflicting information on the topic. For instance, they have listed the order of ʿAlīqulī's birth differently, as the forty seventh son of the shah (according to Amanat) or fifty forth (according to Āl-dāvūd).

8 Cf Riżāqulīkhān Hidāyat, *Rawżat al-Ṣafā-yi Nāṣiri*, Tehran: Khayyam, 1960, vol. 10, pp. 590-1. See also Āl-dāvūd.

(*pīshkār*) of Malik Jahān Khānum, better known as Mahd-i ʿUlyā, mother to the future king Nāṣir-al-Dīn Shah.[9] In this position he became one of her closest confidants, to the point that in the period after the passing of Muḥammad Shah until arrival of Nāṣir-al-Dīn shah in Tehran, when Mahd-i ʿUlyā was in charge, ʿAlīqulī Mīrzā was appointed to a number of high administrative duties. However, he came under suspicion by the new prime minister, Mīrzā Taqī khan, accused of harboring sympathies for certain Babi figures. During the period of the premiership *Ṣadārat* of Mīrzā Taqī Khan (May 1848 to November 1851), ʿAlīqulī was relieved of his duties, which enabled him to resume his studies. It was during this period that he gained a deep acquaintance with the new sciences, and became one of the key figures in Iran in the transition to modern European style education and science. After the demise of Mīrzā Taqī Khan, ʿAlīqulī Mīrzā was again appointed to a number of positions in administration, having to do with various aspects of science and education, including the director of the Dār al-Funūn,[10] and later the first minister of the sciences (*Vazīr-i ʿUlūm*), receiving the title Iʿtiżād al-Salṭana from Nāṣir-al-Dīn Shah in the spring of 1856 (Shaʿbān1272 AH). In his position as the director of the Dār al-Funūn he was responsible for dispatching the first group of Iranian students to Europe to continue their studies there and learn the modern sciences.[11] His interest in the sciences extended from the theoretical sciences to the practical – he was the founder of telegraph lines in Iran, after being made aware of the new technology by Malkam khan, who was an instructor at the Dār al-Funūn. Iʿtiżād al-Salṭana convinced the Shah to finance this new

9 Cf Amanat.

10 Dār al-Funūn was the first institution of higher education in Iran styled according to the new European models, built under the orders of the famed Qajar premiere of the Nāṣirī period, Mīrzā Taqī khan.

11 Among whom his later rival Muḥammad Ḥasan Khan Iʿtimād al-Salṭana.

enterprise, which led to the establishment of the first telegraph line in Iran between the royal palace and the Lālihzār garden, and later between Tehran and Sulṭāniyya in 1858 (1274 AH).[12]

The positions Iʿtiżād al-Salṭana came to assume all had a distinct scholarly connection, or involved dealing with books. As noted, he served as the first Minister of the Sciences (*Vazīr-i ʿUlūm*), in which position he also oversaw the first vaccination efforts in Iran (*Ābilah-Kūbī*),[13] and served as the first director of the Office of the Publications (*Dār al-Ta'līf*) and Print (*Idāra-yi Inṭibāʿāt*).[14] Apart from being a high ranking administrator, Iʿtiżād al-Salṭana was a scholar and patron of scholars as well. Among his many proteges was the poet Qā'ānī, who after falling to disfavor by Mīrzā Taqī khan and losing his salary had the prince Iʿtiżād al-Salṭana intercede for him, and was subsequently appointed to a salaried position as a translator, due to his familiarity with the French language.[15] Iʿtiżād al-Salṭana would host debate sessions (*Majālis-i Munāżara*) for scholars in which he would also participate himself. His other proteges included poets such as Yaghmā-yi Jandaqī, Mīrzā Ṭāhir Iṣfahānī, calligraphers such as ʿAbd al-Raḥīm Hiravī, and scholars such as Mīrzā Aḥmad Ṭabīb Kāshānī.[16] Among the sciences he was particularly fond of the Mathematical sciences, collaborating with Mullā ʿAlīmuḥammad Iṣfahānī on a number of projects, such as translations of selections of Abū Rayḥān Bīrūnī's *Āthār al-Bāqiya*, and a visit to the ruins of the Maragha observatory in Azerbaijan, the report of which was presented to Nāsir-al-Dīn

12 Īraj Afshār, *Jung Iʿtiżād al-Salṭana*, pp. 231-232.
13 Āl-dāvūd
14 Ibid.
15 Amanat.
16 ibid

Shah, and a copy of it is preserved at the Millī library.[17] Although his formal education was entirely in the classical tradition, he was fascinated by the new sciences, which can be seen from his report on the Maragha observatory, as well as his efforts to produce the first translation of Descartes to Persian.[18] Iʿtiżād al-Salṭana frequented elite circles of the Qajar society, from the royal court, to ranks of the high administrators and top scholars. He enlisted a number of close associates and scholars in his grand project, *Nāma-yi Dānishvarān-i Nāṣirī*,, including Mīrzā Abulfażl Sāvujī, Mīrzā Ḥasan Ṭāliqānī Adīb al-ʿUlamā, Mīrzā Muḥammad Mahdī Qazvīnī Shams al-ʿUlamā, and Mullā ʿAbdulwahhāb Qazvīnī.[19]

Towards the end of his life, Iʿtiżād al-Salṭana, who was also a prolific bibliophile, negotiated the transfer of much of his personal library to a friend and fellow member of the Qajar elite society, Mīrzā Ḥusayn khan Qazvīnī, via a massive purchase by the latter, funded by the *waqf* of Mīrzā Ḥusayn khan Sipahsālār. This purchase, which amounted to nearly three thousand titles in manuscripts and some lithographs, became the foundation of the emerging Sipahsālār library, and immortalized this collection thanks to numerous rare gems which the bibliophilic prince had painstakingly collected over decades. The collection of Iʿtiżād al-Salṭana, together with a smaller number of donation from the

17 The facsimile of the report, together with an introduction by Īraj Afshār was published by Tehran University Press in 1977.

18 Amanat mentions that ʿAlīqulī Mīrzā "encouraged" (and in likelihood patronized) the translation into Persian and publication of Descartes' *Discours de la methode* under *the title Ḥikmat-i Nāṣirīya* cf Amanat. The translation was done by the contemporaneous scholar Mullā Lālihzār Hamadānī, and later reproduced, in a new rendering, by Farāmarz Muʿtamid Dizfūlī (Tehran, 2014). See also Ādamīyat, F. *Andīsha-yi Taraqqī va Ḥukūmat-i Qānūn: ʿAṣr-i Sipahsālār*, Tehran, 1972.

19 Father of the prominent early twentieth century scholar Muḥammad Qazvīnī. Likewise, Shams al-ʿUlamā was a tutor to Muḥammad Qazvīnī. For more on the *Nāma-yi Dānishvarān*, see Amanat.

private library was the core of this collection before the passing of Sipahsālār, though the library continued to grow overtime, thanks to the *waqf* associated with it.

2. Mīrzā Ḥusayn Khān Qazvīnī, Sipahsālār, and the Founding of the Library.

The founding of this library through the establishment of an endowment (*waqf*) for it, is intimately related to the career of its progenitor, the famous Qajar era statesman Mīrzā Ḥusayn Khān Qazvīnī (1828-81), also known by various titles bestowed upon him by the Qajar court, including Mushīr al-Dawla, and Sipahsālār.[20] His family had a meteoric rise to power and prominence from humble origins in Māzandarān, beginning with his father Mīrzā Nabī khan Amīr-Divān who had a successful administrative career serving the Qajar prince Muḥammad Taqī Mīrzā Rukn al-Dawla in Qazvin. Rukn al-Dawla was the son of Muḥammad Shah Qajar and was appointed, under Nāṣir-al-Dīn Shah as the governor of Qazvin. He was also briefly the overseer (*Mutawallī*) of the *Awqāf* of the Āstān-i Quds in Mashhad. Serving him, Mīrzā Nabī khan received the title Amīr-Divān, married a daughter of Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shah, and later briefly served as the governor in Shiraz.[21]

20 Cf Saḥāb, pp. 1-32. both of the titles were also held by various other Qajar era statesmen. For instance the title Sipahsālār was previously held by Mīrzā Muḥammad Khan Davallū, who was the Minister of war and Premiere under Nāṣir-al-Dīn shah and died in Mashhad in 1867 (1284 AH), and the title Sipahsālār was granted to Mīrzā Ḥusayn khan by the shah only in 1870. likewise, the title Mushīr al-Dawla, after the passing of Mīrzā Ḥusayn khan was granted to his younger brother, Mīrzā Yaḥyā khan. Cf Munzavī, pp. 4-5.

21 Cf ʿAlībaygī, F. "Muḥammad Taqī Mīrzā Rukn al-Dawla," *Dānishnāma-yi Jahān-i Islām*, vol. 20, pp. 261-263.

Mīrzā Nabī Khan Amīr-Divān and his two elder sons[22] became close associates of the famed Qajar era statesman Mīrzā Taqī Khan (Amīr-i Kabīr), who arranged for their move to Tehran. Ḥusayn, who was the eldest son, was among the first groups of Iranian students sent to Europe to study. Upon return he was appointed to a number of positions in foreign service, beginning with his overseas appointment as charges d'affaires of Iranian consulate on Bombay, where he served for four years.[23] Following a successful tenure in Bombay he was appointed consul general in Tbilisi (1851), then special envoy to Istanbul, later promoted to Ambassador to the Ottoman court (1856).[24] In that position he was in charge of the delicate negotiations and practical arrangement of the Royal visit by Nāṣir-al-Dīn Shah to the Shi'i holy cities of Iraq in 1870. During the period of his residence in Istanbul he also became close to a circle of Iranian intellectuals there including Mīrzā Malkam Khan, and Mīrzā Fatḫ-ʿAlī Ākhūndzādah.

Upon return to Iran he was appointed to the cabinet and served as Prime Minister (*Ṣadr-i Aʿẓam*). He held a number of positions in the cabinet including secretary of war and secretary of foreign affairs, before being apparently demoted to governor of Qazvin in 1873. He was reinstated in his old position the next year, and later also appointed as governor of Khurasan. However, he was sacked from premiership a second time in 1880, and died the next year in Mashhad.[25]

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22 Mīrzā Nabī Khan had four sons from three wives. For details cf Saḥāb, *Tārikh-i Madrasa-yi Sipahsalār*, pp. 1-5.

23 Iʿtimād al-Salṭana, *Ṣadr al-Tavārikh*, ed. Mushīrī, Tehran, 1979, pp. 263.

24 Saḥāb, *Tārikh-i Madrasa-yi Sipahsalār*, pp. 5-7.

25 For a more detailed account, including details of the two sackings and travels with the shah see Saḥāb, pp. 20-27. Quite possible he was executed via the popular method of the Nāṣirī period, the Qajar coffee, which appears to have also been the method used to eliminate the previous Sipahsālār, Mīrzā Muḥammad khan.

The final years of the career of the Sepahsālār were rather tumultuous. He spent some time in Rasht after the first sacking before returning to Tehran to resume a new position in the cabinet. When he was sacked a second time and was sent to Mashhad, he briefly assumed, among other positions also the position of the caretaker (*Mutawallī*) of the *Awqāf* of the Rażavī shrine, which includes the magnificent library of the Āstān-i Quds. This was a position of distinct scholarly bend and one which was previously also held by his father's patron, and drew him even closer to circles of classical scholarship in Iran.

In the last years of his life, following his first sacking and accelerated after his second sacking in 1880 (1297 AH), Mīrzā Ḥusayn Khan, who had no son and apparent heir, started his grand project to build a mosque and madrasa in Tehran, after the famed Chahārbāgh Madrasa of the Safavid era in Isfahan, on a prime piece of land he had purchased in central Tehran.[26] For this purpose he created a *waqf*, so that the project may continue after what he correctly predicted was his imminent demise.[27] To this *waqf* he endowed that prime piece of land, south of the Bahāristān palace (later home to become Majlis-i Shūrā-yi Millī), as well as proceeds of some lands and *qanāts* he owned, plus substantial sums of other assets[28] (presumably also out of fear of the said assets being confiscated by the Qajar court). He prepared a detailed *Waqfnāma* in a hurried manner, and arranged a public signing of the Endowment deed in September1880 hosted in his private

26 The plot of land was purchased by him much earlier. In the northern part of it he had build his residential quarters and the southern part of the land was left as a garden, until he endowed it to the *waqf* for the purpose of building the madrasa. cf. Munzavī, pp. 4-5.

27 Saḥāb, pp. 35-36.

28 See Saḥāb, pp. 46-49 for the shorter version of the *Waqfnāma*, where the lands endowed to the *waqf* in Tehran, Qazvin, and Fārs have been specified

residence, and attended by a number of notable clerics and politicians of the time.[29]

Not only did the impetus for building the mosque and the library come rather late in his life, after the first sacking from power, the actual construction did not start until even later, in 1879. Hoping apparently to safeguard the land and the *waqf* from transgression by the court, he appointed already at the public signing of the deed, a member of the royal house as the steward (*Mutawalli*) of the *waqf*, who was none other than his close friend, the Qajar prince Iʿtiżād al-Salṭana. He also stipulated that after his passing the stewardship be handed to the reigning monarch (at the time, Nāṣir-al-Dīn Shah).

The controversial, and incredibly detailed *Waqfnāma*, which deserves a study of its own, was signed the same day by a number of notable clerics of the period present at the gathering, including the Imām Jumʿa of Tehran, Sayyid Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn. The construction of the buildings of the mosque and the library had already started after the first sacking, and after a brief pause following his second sacking it resumed but was not completed before his death in1881 (1298 AH). The construction continued under the direction of his younger brother Mīrzā Yaḥyā Khan Mushīr al-Dawla, who also passed in 1892 (1309 AH) before the construction was quite over. Since then the Mosque and the Madrasa have been managed by a number of deputies (*Nāyib Tawalliyat*). Munzavī has prepared a detailed list of all the deputies

29 Munzavī comments (vol. 3, pp 5-6) that a number of attendees objected to the terms of the *Waqfnāma*, and insisted since the physical building of the mosque is not complete, it can't be legally endowed in a *waqf* deed as a mosque (presumably to curry favor with Nāṣir-al-Dīn Shah, in case he may wish to confiscated the assets of Mīrzā Ḥusayn Khan). The complete text of the Waqfnāma is itself preserved as one of the manuscripts at the Sipahsālār library, MS Sipahsālār 464. see Munzavī, p. 5.

with years of service in that post, listing no fewer than 27 different periods (occasionally the same person would hold the same position during different periods) until 1977 which was the date of the publication of the catalogue by him and Dānishpazhūh.

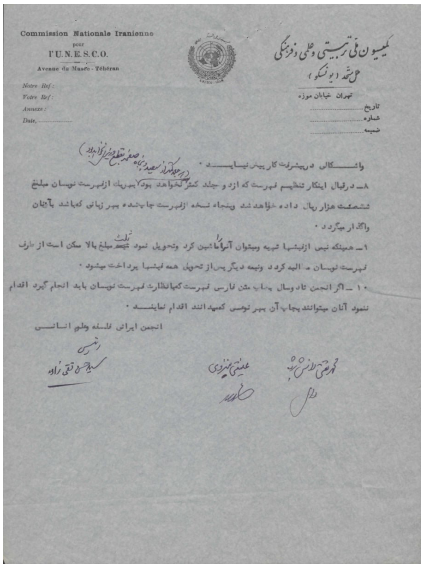

Image 1 Final page of the publication contract offered by the Iranian Institute of Philosophy and the Humanities to Munzavī and Dānishpazhūh for the new catalogue of the Sipahsālār manuscripts, signed by Sayyid Ḥasan Taqīzādah, Markaz-i Asnād, Tehran University

The actual books at the library (both manuscripts and lithographs) have been a growing collection, starting with a modest donation of books by Sipahsālār from his personal library, and books from a collection of purchases he made in the final year of his life. The books from the donated and purchased collection then were donated to the *waqf* of the library, together with their purchase record, also preserved in notebooks and donated to the waqf. The core of this early collection, however, was the massive purchase of the private library of Iʿtiżād al-Salṭana, amounting to nearly 3,000 titles, such that the number of library holdings before the death of Sipahsālār reached 3372 codices, plus a number of scrolls and observational instruments (such as astrolabes), excluding the

lithographs.[30] All manuscripts in this core collection were stamped with the ownership mark of the *waqf* dated 15 Dhū-l-Ḥajja 1297 (20 November 1880).[31]

Since, per stipulation of the expansive *Waqfnāma* of Sipahsālār, a portion of the profits to be generated from the assets endowed to the library must go towards procuring new titles and expanding the library holdings, the number of both printed books and manuscripts held by the library continued to grow, which presented a distinct challenge in listing and cataloguing. That is because the acquisitions, primarily of notable private libraries as well as libraries of notable *madrasas* that wished to conjoin their holdings, would often come with their own system of numbering and arrangement. There was a need for a team of scholars to supervise this transfer and cataloguing under the aegis of the *waqf* of Sipahsālār, while also preserving the organizational structure of the collections purchased or donated.

The actual growth of the collection was not linear and fluctuated in time. After a number of early acquisitions and donations listed by Munzavī,[32] the growth came to a near halt, before it resumed growth under the supervisorship of later caretakers of the *waqf*, in the late Qajar and Pahlavi period, mostly through acquisition of private libraries of scholars and other notable individuals. The earliest such donation was a small batch by the late Qajar period statesman, Aḥmad Khan Mushīr al-Salṭana, who would become the prime minister after the closure of the parliament under Muḥammad-ʿAlī Shah. There were also a number of institutional acquisitions, on top of personal collections, in particular that of the

30 Munzavī pp. 9-14.
31 Munzavī, p. 8.
32 Munzavī, pp. 8-10.

library of the Ṣadr madrasa,[33] and the personal library of Mushīr al-Salṭana.[34]

The first effort to number and catalogue the holdings of the Sipahsālār library was overseen by Mīrzā Abū l-Qāsim, the son of Mullābāshī Lārījānī, who was a confidant of Mīrzā Yaḥyā khan Mushīr al-Dawla, the younger brother to Sipahsālār.[35]

3.Taking Stock: Cataloguing a Treasure House

Cataloguing a collection which was constantly growing, and was made up of various personal libraries with their own systems of record keeping and varying standards, made the task of cataloguing the collection of the Sepahsālār madrasa specially challenging. The very first list of the holdings was a list prepared in the *siyāq* script, of the massive purchase of the library of Iʿtiżād al-Salṭana by the Sipahsālār. The purchase record comprised 7 booklets, each listing at the end also the number of titles listed in that booklet, together with the purchase price for each. At the beginning of each booklet the date of the purchase of that batch was recorded as well. This list was prepared by the first librarian (*Kitābdār*) of the Sipahsālār library, Mīrzā Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Mullābāshī. It also includes, in the hand of the Mullābāshī, a list of a separate donation of 50 lithographs and 54 manuscripts by the Sipahsālār following a private purchase by the Sipahsālār. These lists were later copied into 2 volumes, which were for the longest time considered lost

33 Ṣadr madrasa was founded by Mīrzā Shafīʿ who was the premiere (Ṣadr-i Aʿẓam) of Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shah, was located in Tehran opposite the Masjid-i Shāh on the western side, and was, similar to the madrasa of Sipahsālār, governed through an enduring endowment (*waqf-i jārī*). A collection of 255 lithographs and 57 manuscripts from the Ṣadr library were donated to Sepahsālār in 1936. cf Munzavī pp. 9-10.
34 This was carried out in the same year as the collection of the Ṣadr madrasa, amounting to a total of 612 titles in 287 codices. cf. Munzavī, pp. 9-10.
35 ibid.

until they were located by Munzavī and Dānishpazhūh in the 1970s during their efforts to prepare a comprehensive catalogue of the collection, and adjoined to the holdings of the library as manuscripts no. 463 and 464.

When the task of overseeing the library was taken over by the newly established office of the *Awqāf* in 1914 (1332 AH) a separate list was prepared of the total holdings until that date and was adjoined with the lists of the Ṣadr library and the library of Mushīr al-Salṭana, in a somewhat disjointed collection of lists in lieu of a real catalogue.[36] A complicating factor was that in case of some of acquisitions (such as the collection of Mushīr al-Salṭana) there were two separate lists made of the same collection, with unrelated reference numbers, which made the streamlining of the catalogues specially challenging.[37]

The first effort at what may be called "a catalogue" of the totality of the Sipahsālār library was carried out by ibn Yūsuf Shīrāzī during the period 1934-39, in two volumes, consisting of 7 and 6 parts respectively, arranged thematically. However, this was not a comprehensive catalogue, but rather a descriptive listing of titles that fall under select "topics." While ibn Yūsuf's list aimed for maximal coverage, it still allowed for exceptions. The listing under each 'topic' was not complete, in the sense that no claim was made that the list contains all titles in the holding relevant to the chosen topic, or that the chosen topics will cover all volumes. Nor is it clear what system was used to label each MS with each topic, and if there were MS that did not receive any labels. The most serious cataloguing project was carried out by Dānishpazhūh and

36 For details, see Munzavī pp. 11-16.
37 ibid.

Munzavī, with a preface prepared by Munzavī, based on a project that apparently started already in 1956, following a meeting of the Iranian Institute of Philosophy,[38] with the first volume drafted in 1960, though numerous revisions and corrections, as well as other intervening factors delayed the publication until 1977.[39]

Dānishpazhūh and Munzavī started by collecting the various listings and purchase records first, some listed chronologically, some alphabetically, and some thematically, on top of purchase records with no particular order to them, and organized them into eight distinct groups,[40] before collecting the individual information cards (fiches) and expanding them into longer entries used for their own catalogue. They also prepared a short description for each piece they inspected, which has given their catalogue extra utility and value for researchers. While acquisitions and donations to the Sipahsālār library, both private and institutional, have continued since that date, as envisioned by the *waqf*, no updated catalogue has been prepared, with one exception, of the lithographs housed at the library.

4. A Window into a Garden of Books: Some Observations

It is clearly impossible to do justice to this massive and impressive library in a short paper like this. At the same time, one can try and get a sense of the kind of material the library holds, by looking at noteworthy instances, both that which is typical of what the library

38 Anjuman-i Īrānī-yi Falsafa, today Mu'assasa-yi Pazhūhishī-yi Ḥikmat va Falsafa.
39 Munzavī, vol. 3, p. 4.
40 Munzavī, vol. 3, pp. 11-1. they also mention a cataloguing project which was alluded to in the publication of Saḥāb from 1950, though never came to fruition. Indeed Saḥāb mentions (Saḥāb, p. 196) that two scholars (Tūysirkānī and Chārdihī) were commissioned to prepare an expansion of the list of ibn Yūsuf. There is no record of this catalogue, if it was ever completed.

holds, as well as that which is rare and makes it special. This shall give us a window into the special make up of the Sipahsālār library, what makes it distinct from other major collections, and how it deserves more focused and detailed studies dedicated to it exclusively. In what follows I will briefly introduce 25 manuscripts, which may be regarded as a vignette of a princely library. The first noteworthy group of manuscripts in this collection is perhaps those dealing with 'science' broadly defined, especially the classics of the scientific texts in the Arabic and Islamic tradition, with a focus on the mathematical sciences, as it was a particular point of interest to Iʿtiżād al-Salṭana.

D1. MS Sipahsālār 682. *Wajīz al-Zīj al-Muʿtabar al-Sulṭānī*, by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Khāzinī (6th cent AH) a very early copy of an important text on astral sciences, apparently a revised, and shortened version of a longer work which preceded it. Al-Khāzinī produced the original 'complete' version of his Astronomical Tables (*Zīj*) based on observations carried out over several decades and arranged ca 510 AH which was later formatted for dedication to his patron the last of the Seljuq Sultans, Sanjar (r. 511-552 AH, 1096-1157). The *Zīj-i Sulṭānī* or *Zīj-i Sanjarī* is an incredibly important *Zīj* produced for the Seljuq sovereign of which only two near complete manuscripts of it have been identified (Brit. Mus. Ar. 761, and Vatican MS Or. 6669). The 'abridged version' or *wajīz*, was produced considerably later, in 525 AH. It includes a new preamble and a substantially modified structure of the theoretical part of the *Zīj*, as well as occasional updated observational values. Of the *wajīz* also there are only two identified manuscripts extant, the present copy in the collection of Iʿtiżād al-Salṭana in the Sipahsālār library, both from the early Ilkhanid period, one in the

Hamidiye library in Türkiye, MS Hamidiye 859, both produced in the early Ilkhanid period.

D2. MS Sipahsālār 594. (cf. Munzavī, vol. 3 pp. 340-341). A fine copy of the Arabic translation of the *Almagest*, bearing the ownership mark of Iʿtiżād al-Salṭana, though Naqībī comments[41] that a few folios from the beginning are missing, and where the text resumes it is identical with the text of *Taḥrīr* of Ṭūsī, suggesting it has been misidentified by the cataloguers. The library separately holds four copies of *Taḥrīr al-Majisṭī* of Ṭūsī all of which also from the princely collection (MS Sipahsālār 590-593), as well as four commentaries on the same text (complete or partial) by Ṭūsī and his pupil Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī. In all the library holds over 200 (212) copies of compositions by Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, a remarkable number for any library of this size, but also notable when contrasted with other major authors and how many copies of their works can be found at the Sipahsālār library. For instance, of perhaps the most influential and certainly one of the most prolific authors of the Islamic intellectual tradition, Ibn Sina, there are only 126 manuscripts at the Sipahsālār library, and of one of the foundational scholars of the Imāmī Shi'i tradition, Shaykh Ṭūsī, only 57.

D3-10. MSS Sipahsālār 559, 597, 689, 697, 690, 4727, 592, 593, 688, 690, (cf. Munzavī, vol. 3 pp. 341-350) a near complete collection of the 'Renderings' *Taḥrīrāt* of the classical works of Greek math and astronomy, by Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, including *Taḥrīr*

41 Naqībī, *Mu'arrifi-yi Nuskha-yi Majisṭī dar Kitabkhana-yi Sipahsālār.*

Uṣūl Uqlīdus,[42] *Taḥrīr al-Kura al-Mutaḥarrika*,[43] *Taḥrīr Ukar* (*li-Manalā'ūs*),[44] *Taḥrīr al-Muʿṭiyāt*,[45] *Taḥrīr Kitāb al-Kura wa l Ustuwāna*,[46] *Taḥrīr Kitāb al-Ma'khūdhāt*,[47] *Taḥrīr Kitāb al-Masākin*,[48] *Taḥrīr Kitāb al-Maṭāliʿ*,[49] *Taḥrīr Kitāb al-Mafrūḍāt*,[50] *Taḥrīr al-Majisṭī.*[51]

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42 Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī's famous rendering of Euclid's Elements, which enjoyed enormous popularity in pre-modern mathematical learning in the Islamic East, particularly in Iran, and even included in the "standard" educational curricula of the madrasas up to the nineteenth century. It was also widely printed in lithograph.

43 A rendering of *On the Moving Sphere* by Autolycus of Pitane, part of the so called Middle Books, i.e. mathematical books to be studied for the learner after Euclid's *Elements*, and before Ptolemy's *Almagest*.

44 *The Book of Spherical Propositions* (*Sphaerica*), by Menelaus of Alexandria. The greek author is mentioned in the title to distinguish it from another famous greek text by the same title, by a different mathematician, Theodosius of Bithynia.

45 Euclid's *Data (Dedomena)* a book on geometry concerning deductions that can be made about a geometrical problem if only some of the values are known. Part of the so called Middle Books that a student would study after the Elements, and before the Almagest.

46 Ṭūsī's rendering of the text of *On the Sphere and Cylinder*, by Archimedes. A classical work of Greek geometry dealing with the questions of calculating volumes and surface areas of geometrical shapes.

47 Ṭūsī's rendering of the *Book of Lemmas* (or *Book of Assumptions*) attributed to Archimedes. The Arabic version of this according to a translation made by Thābit ibn Qurra (third century AH) was popular in mathematical education in pre-modern Islamic societies. A seventeenth century Latin translation made of it based on the Arabic version was also popular in Europe.

48 Ṭūsī's rendering of one of the Middle Books of the Greek mathematical tradition titled *On Habitations*, by the Greek mathematician of first century BCE, Theodosius of Bithynia, best known for his book on spherical geometry, titled *Sphaerics*.

49 Ṭūsī's rendering of the book *On Ascensions*, by the Greek mathematician of the second century BCE, Hypsicles of Alexandria. This book was well known in the classical Islamic tradition of learning in Mathematics, after al-Kindī ordered a translation of it which he then elaborated on and expanded. Later it was translated again by Qusṭā ibn Lūqā of Baalbek. Ṭūsī's rendering of it was apparently first produced in the Alamūt period, but revised in Maragha.

50 Ṭūsī's rendering of one of the texts of the Middle books, *Hypotheses*, by the Arabic mathematician of the ninth century (third century AH) Thābit ibn Qurra of Ḥarrān. It contains 36 propositions in elementary geometry and geometrical algebra, and was usually taught alongside Greek texts.

51 Ṭūsī's rendering of Ptolemy's *Almagest*. Perhaps one of the most famous, and most read texts in the Islamic mathematical tradition.

It is interesting to notice that the overwhelming majority of the holdings of the library in classical Islamic math and astronomy come from the collection of Iʿtiżād al-Salṭana, including all but one of the manuscripts listed above. Furthermore, and several of them (including Sipahsālār 559 and Sipahsālār 597) are very rare old copies, from the eighth century AH, copied from an exemplar in the hand of Ṭūsī himself. The one manuscript which is not part of the princely collection (MS Sipahsālār 4727) is in fact even rarer, a seventh century AH copy of an original in the hand of Ṭūsī from 651 AH, in the Alamūt period (pre-dating the fall of Alamūt by three years and the fall of Baghdad by five). Consulting acquisition records may reveal further details about the circumstances of this MS and its inclusion in the library. Apart from the "classical" sciences, the library also holds a number of manuscripts in what may be deemed as the 'practical' manifestations of scientific and technological knowledge, both traditional, and modern, including

D11. MS Sipahsālār 2859. (cf. Munzavī, vol. 3, pp. 543-544) a Persian treatise, of an unidentified author, titled *Tīrandāzī Bā Kamān*, on the techniques and manners of archery, and hunting with bow and arrow. Since the subject does not fit into the standard categories developed by ibn Yūsuf, it did not appear in the earlier listings. It is unclear whether the primary purpose of such a text would be practical or for entertainment. This copy was apparently the personal copy of Iʿtiżād al-Salṭana, containing some handwriting by him, and bearing his ownership mark, dated 1280 AH.

D12. MS Sipahsālār 2757. *Kitāb Qawāʿid Tilīgrāf*, by ʿAbd al-Ghaffār Iṣfahānī Munajjim Bāshī, dedicated to Nāṣir-al-Dīn Shah and prince Iʿtiżād al-Salṭana, it included an elaborated list of various cities and how far they are from each other by degrees (i.e. latitude

and longitude) as well as distance, apparently prepared for the purpose of billing for the developing telegraph lines. (cf. Munzavī and Dānishpazhūh vol. 3 p 502) To a lesser extent, sciences other than Mathematics are represented represented, including some noteworthy copies.

D13. MS Sipahsālār 3100, *Dhakhīra-yi Khwārazmshāhī*, by Ismāʿīl ibn Ḥasan Jurjānī, sixth century AH (cf. Munzavī, vol. 4, pp. 550-552), from the princely collection of Iʿtiżād al-Salṭana. Remarkably, the Sipahsālār collection is in possession of no fewer than five different copies[52] of this early Persian text on medical practice.[53] What distinguishes this particular copy, however, is that it is written in Judeo-Persian, i.e. Persian text transcribed into the Hebrew alphabet, by an Iranian Jewish scholar, and a testament to Judeo-Persian learning in pre-modern Iran. It is not clear if the ʿAlīqulī Mīrzā's interest in this copy was of scientific or antiquarian nature.

D14. MS Sipahsālār 664. An illustrated copy of *Kitāb al-Tafhīm li Awā'il Ṣināʿat al-Tanjīm*, by the famed fifth century AH scholar, Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī, also from the collection of Iʿtiżād al-Salṭana. Of the text of *al-Tafhīm* there is an Arabic and a Persianversion extant, both prepared by al-Bīrūnī himself,

52 MS Sipahsālār 3086, 3087, 3088, 3089, 3100, as lone standing codices and not part of a *majmūʿa*, all from the princely collection.

53 There are many copies of this text available in various manuscript libraries in the world, which is testament to its popularity in the pre-modern period, as well as the prevalence of medical writing in languages other than Arabic in pre-modern Islamic East. There have been several efforts to prepare a critical edition of the text, first by Afshār and Dānishpazhūh (1956) then by Iʿtimād, Shahrād, and Muṣṭafavī (1965), followed by Khānlarī (1976) and Muḥarrirī (2001), though they have each relied on the old method of picking a more preferable manuscript as the exemplar and collating the variations in one or more other manuscripts, and not made a full stemma codicum. Likewise, there are no studies of the Judeo-Persian copy listed here.

presumably.[54] This copy appears to be the Persian version, but not a particularly early copy (twelfth century AH). What is noteworthy about this copy is that it is illustrated. *Al-Tafhīm* is not among the usual candidates for production of illustrated copies so this is a rare attestation. The library also holds a slightly earlier copy (MS Sipahsālār 665) of the same text, both with the ownership marks of the prince. (cf. Munzavī, vol. 3, pp. 485-486) Of course the more likely candidate for illustrations are the classical favorites such as the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī, or the *Khamsa* of Niẓāmī. Of the latter the library holds one of the finest specimen.

D15. MS Sipahsālār 400.[55] A lavish illustrated copy of the twelfth century (sixth century AH) Persian poem by Niẓāmī of Ganja, produced in 956 AH by Khwāja Mīrak Shīrāzī, containing at least 30 illustrations. The Khamsa was a popular text for the production of illustrated copies, as witnessed by an extraordinary number of illustrated copies around the world,[56] so it is perhaps not surprising that a Qajar prince should own a nice copy.[57]

D16. MS Sipahsālār 1871, bearing the ownership mark of Iʿtiżād al-Salṭana) (cf. Munzavī, vol 5 pp 355-6). *Fākihat al-Khulafā wa*

54 Cf the introduction by Jalāl Humāyī to his edition of the Persian *al-Tafhīm*, Tehran: Anjuman-i Āthār-i Millī, 1975.

55 This listing is missing from missing from the catalogue of Munzavī and Dānishpazhūh. It is unclear why that should be the case, especially since the reference number suggests it must have belonged to Iʿtiżād al-Salṭana. The electronic information card (fiche) of the online portal also suffers from lacunae, it is possible that the copy is damaged or at the time of the efforts of Dānishpazhūh and Munzavī was not available.

56 In a listing prepared by Farhangistān-i Hunar at least 70 pre-modern illustrated copies of the Khamsa have been identified, including many produced outside Iran, particularly central Asia and India. For instance Brit Mus. 12208 which was a royal copy prepared for the Mughal emperor Akbar. In Staatsbibliothek in Berlin alone, there are 14 illustrated copies of the Khamsa.

57 For more info on this MS check Ḥusaynīrād, ʿAbdulmajīd, *Shāhkārhā-yi Nigārgarī-yi Irān*, Tehran: Mūza-yi Hunarhā-yi Muʿāṣir 1384 Sh [2005].

Mufākahat al-Żurafā,[58] a late copy (thirteenth century AH) of the famed text by ibn ʿArabshāh (d. 854 AH), itself an Arabic translation of the original Persian of the *Marzubān-Nāma*, by Varāvīnī.[59]

D17-22. MS Sipahsālār 158, 422, 2680, 2193, 366, 369. (cf Munzavī vol 5 p. 369). No fewer than six different MS titled *Farhād u Shīrīn*, by Amīr ʿAlīshīr Navāyī (d. 906 AH) Vaḥshī Bāfqī (d. 991 AH), Viṣāl Shīrāzī (d. 1262 AH), and one by the 11 century poet Aḥmad Yazdī, the last of which consists entirely of ridicule and obscenities (*Hazliyyāt*) in the style of ʿUbayd Zākānī.

D23. MS Sipahsālār 1339. (cf Munzavī, vol. 3, p. 400). An Ottoman Turkish translation of the Persian original of *Anwār-i Suhaylī* by Ḥusayn Kāshifī Sabzavārī (d. 910 AH), which is in turn, a Persian rendering of the fables of the *Pancha Tantra*, commissioned by Amir Niẓām al-Dīn Shaykh Aḥmad Suhaylī.[60] The library holds four more copies of the Persian text, one of which from the collection of Iʿtiżād al-Salṭana. While the text may be categorized under "Mirror for Princes" or "Advice Literature," in later centuries it was also of wide popularity as entertainment literature among Iranian nobility, which gave rise to its popularity, and occasional illustrated copies of it.

58 This book was well known and popular also among the early orientalists in Europe. Freytag prepared a rudimentary edition which was printed in bonn in 1832. A critical edition of the Arabic text and commentary was published in 2001 in Cairo, by Ayman ʿAbd al-Jābir al-Buḥayrī.

59 There are not many comparative studies available of *Marzubān-Nāma* and *Fākihat al-Khulafā*. One exception is the 1967 dissertation by Muḥammad Mahdī Kurrānī, American University of Beirut.

60 See Āqā Buzurg Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīʿa ilā Taṣānīf al-Shīʿa*, Beirut. vol. 9-1, p. 143.

D24. MS Sipahsālār 2247 *Jāmiʿ al-Maqāṣid fi Sharḥ al-Qawāʿid* commentary by al-Muḥaqqiq al-Karakī (d. 940 AH) on *Qawāʿid al-Aḥkām* of ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī (d. 726 AH). The library holds at least 7 different copies of the same text, apparently by seven different scribes. This particular one is rather amusing, as will be explained below.

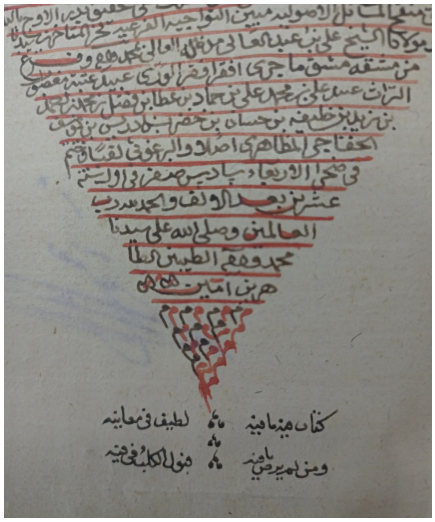

Image 2 (photo credit: Hasan Ghasemi)

While this is not a particularly early copy of this popular text, and is of little value for a scholarly study, nor is it particularly lavish to merit its inclusion in a princely library, it contains a peculiar colophon. The scribe, who appears otherwise unknown, seems to have included an extended genealogy for himself, listing 12 generations of his ancestors, before the date of the completion, in the familiar triangular pattern. Following that he has appended two lines of poetry in Arabic. While it is customary for the scribes to include a little prayer in the end or ask for prayers from the reader, it is rare, though it sometimes happens that scribes add a little personal note in the end, or even complain about something. Here the scribe is engaged in venting perhaps, pre-emptively cursing the

dissatisfied reader. The poetry roughly translates to: "This book, within it is what there is.[61] It is fine in its meanings and expressions. Whoever is not satisfied with what is in it, may dogs urinate in his mouth."

D25. MS Sipahsālār 3084, from the collection of Iʿtiżād al-Salṭana. A very early copy of the *Nahj al*-Balāgha, probably from the 6th or 7th century AH, based on material and stylistic observations,[62] on the margins of which the commentary of Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī, *Minhāj al-Barāʿa fī Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāgha*,[63] appears, which puts the time of the composition nearly contemporaneous with the life of al-Rāwandī (d. 573 AH). A more detailed description of this rare and valuable copy appears already in the list produced by ibn Yūsuf Shīrāzī (vol. 2, p. 154). This unique copy of the *Nahj al-Balāgha* is a valuable object of study specially for historians of pre-Ilkhanid Shi'ism in Iran.

5. A Personal Matter: The Makeup of the Sipahsālār Library

While the Sipahsālār collection has continued to grow, it is primarily consists, even after all the acquisitions, of a collection of private libraries of notable individuals of the Iranian society, in particular the nobility. Indeed the princely collection discussed above constitutes to this date more than a third of the entire holdings. This raises the question what is special about such collections and how they differ from others. A summary assessment based on the instances scrutinized above appears to suggest the library as a whole reflects the "personal" nature of its

61 This is rather cryptic, and on the surface it seems to suggest the note should be about the famous composition by Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, titled *Fihi mā Fihi*.
62 Thanks to H. Ghasemi for their assistance.
63 A critical edition of this text by Ḥabīballāh Khūyī was published in Tehran, in 1959, in 14 volumes.

constituent collections, the lion's share of which is the princely collection discussed. That can be seen from preference for certain topics (such as Mathematics and Astronomy) or certain authors (such as Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī) mentioned earlier (cf. D1, D2, D3-10). One group of books stands out perhaps, as specially a feature of a princely collection, and perhaps reflective of the collecting habits of the nobility, or at any rate a learned gentleman at the court, and that is the relatively large number of manuscripts that feature aspects of entertainment or amusement. That includes several groups of manuscripts, such as those were the content is meant, at least partially, to entertain, such as books that contain plentiful anecdotes, stories, etc. (D16, D17-22, D23, listed above), or beautifully illustrated manuscripts whether common or not (D14, D15), or just manuscripts with something peculiar about them, such as a Judeo-Persian version of a medical text (on top of four other manuscripts of the same work) though it is unclear if the prince was either a connoisseur of medical manuscripts or even proficient in the Hebrew script. And finally, copies that suggest the prince had a penchant for entertaining marginalia, obscenities and erotica, most clearly seen in the penultimate manuscript featured above (D24) but also a definite feature of some of the lesser known romance themed literary pieces, such as some in the D17-22 group of the manuscripts titled *Farhād u Shīrīn*. As such, the manuscript collection of the Sipahsālār library, despite its considerable size and significance, still very much exhibits the features of a personal, private library, or a collection of libraries of the elite of the Qajar society. This opens a window into the reading and collecting habits of the scholarly elite of the period, worthwhile subject of study on its own.