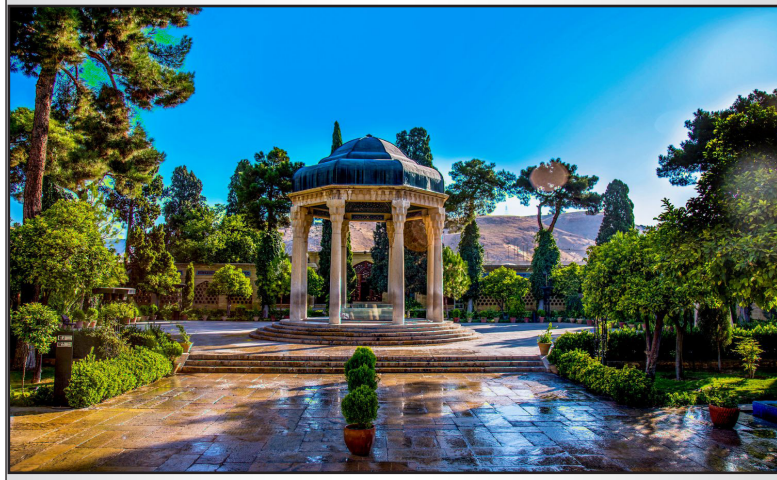


## Mystical Power of Persian Poets



Tomb of Hafez at Hāfezieh of Shiraz

By: Ali Hammoud\*

*SYDNEY (Guardian) -- There are few poetic traditions in the world that have entrenched themselves so deeply in their respective societies as has the Persian poetic tradition. This presence, however, is not limited to discussions within literary circles or the adornment of public monuments. Nor is it strictly a source of aesthetic beauty. Within Persian speaking societies, people from all walks of life consult poetry for profound spiritual instruction or genuine guidance for the big decisions in life. This is particularly the case with Hafez.*

*Within the pantheon of Persian poets, perhaps none is as cherished and revered as Hafez, and with good reason. Reading the poetry of Hafez induces fragmented moments where one oscillates between body and soul; indeed, Wheeler Thackston writes that Hafez "sang a rare blend of human and mystic love so balanced, proportioned, and contrived with artful ease that it is impossible to separate the one from the other". Within his poetic lines are levels and layers, each unfolding simultaneously upon the page and within the reader. Ethics, aesthetics and philosophy are all intertwined, and all possible meanings simmer simultaneously beneath the surface.*

*I became acquainted with Persian poetry through learning Persian for my PhD. Alongside its utility as a research language, reading these poetic works has inspired a great deal of joy and spiritual contemplation. Leaning on the perspectives of well-known commentators, I present below an analysis of a verse to demonstrate the multi-layered and rich understanding of Hafez, with the hope that it will also inspire introspection, wherever stage you may be at in life, as it has for Persian readers for generations upon generations.*

*In Shiraz I am famous for my love's lively ways  
My eyes have not been polluted with an evil gaze  
On first reading, the meaning of the verse – in the original Persian – is apparent. Hafez is famous – or infamous – in Shiraz for his exuberant love and does not attune his eyes to see the faults of others. This is an admirable trait, particularly prominent within Malamati Sufism, that one should busy oneself with one's own faults instead of the perceived faults of others. The key principles of the Malamati worldview include exuberant love; being open with one's beliefs; concealing the faults of others; persevering through sneers and censures of others; and a perpetual struggle against self-centeredness.*

*The second level takes a step further. The evil gaze can also be interpreted as one infused with desire; not desire in and of itself, but a base desire motivated by deceit and duplicity that festers within the lower parts of the human soul and incites one to evil. Hafez informs us that he does not gaze upon others with such a fraudulent eye, instead opting to look upon others with genuine care and compassion.*

*But beyond these levels is something else; a perspective that offers a radical rethinking of how we view the relationship between God and creation. In the first line, when Hafez says that he is renowned in Shiraz for his audacious expressions of love, he is speaking to the idea that love is not something that can remain concealed. A lover may be able to conceal their love for a brief period of time, but if it is a true love, it will eventually burst forth; every glowing glance and minor motion will sing songs of their love. In this respect the lover mirrors God, as not even God could conceal his love, weaving it seamlessly into the tapestry of the cosmos.*

*The second line explains the result of this manifest love. The lover does not pollute their eye with seeing bad because a lover only sees beauty in existence. A gaze that is infused with love, purity and sincerity is incapable of seeing any evil in the world. The world's beauty comes to the fore in all that they see, radiating from the mundane. The hidden hand of God becomes visible, the artist and artwork become one, and the Qur'anic verse "And God's is the east and the west: and wherever you turn, there is God's countenance" manifests before one's eyes.*

*The aim of this piece is not to convince anyone that my reading of Hafez is correct, but to inspire others to delve deeper into Persian literature. Words possess a quasi-mystical power and, in the hands of the master Persian poets, can engender serious transformation: long-buried emotions are stirred, long-forgotten memories are retrieved and long-lost truths are found again. All that is left for us is to read them.*

\*Ali Hammoud is a PhD candidate at Western Sydney University.

# Tehran Governor Visits Prominent Church

TEHRAN -- Tehran Governor Muhammad Sadeq Motamedian has visited St. Thomas Evangelical Church in the Iranian capital city.

During his visit, he engaged in heartfelt conversations with Iranian minorities celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ (PBUH).

He took the opportunity to extend his warm wishes to Iranian minorities for 2025.

Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Judaism are recognized as legitimate religions in the Islamic Republic and their followers enjoy freedom of worship. They also have their own representatives in the parliament.

Most Armenians who make up the biggest Christian community in Iran live in Tehran, Isfahan, and the northwestern provinces.

Mirza-ye Shirazi Street, a formerly Armenian neighborhood with a large church, and Majidieh neighborhood in the east of the capital where many Armenian families live have become the most popular destinations for Christmas enthusiasts in Tehran who want to immerse themselves in a Christmassy mood and environment.

Tabriz, the capital of the East Azarbaijan Province, has a smaller Armenian and Assyro-Chaldean population than Tehran and Isfahan. Tabriz has several churches including the Saint Mary



Iranian Christians celebrate the Nativity of Jesus at the Armenian Catholic St. Gregory Church of Tehran.

Armenian Apostolic church dating to the Safavid period.

Assyro-Chaldeans celebrate on December 25 but unbeknownst to most ordinary Iranians, Armenians celebrate Christmas on January 6 following the tradition of Eastern Orthodox Christians.

Vank Cathedral, a four-hundred-year-old church and major sightseeing destination in Jolfa, Isfahan's old Armenian quarter, is another very popular destination for Christmas enthusiasts.

Some travel to the city in December and early January only to visit the cathedral and the beautiful lighting and decorations on display.

## Khorsabad Reveals Villa Twice Size of White House

BAGHDAD (American Geophysical Union) -- Archaeologists in northern Iraq have conducted an extensive magnetic survey using an exhaustive magnetic survey at Khorsabad, once the ancient Assyrian capital, and with the help of this technology have found the remains of a huge villa (with 127 rooms), royal gardens, the city's water gate and five large buildings that may have been used for various purposes.

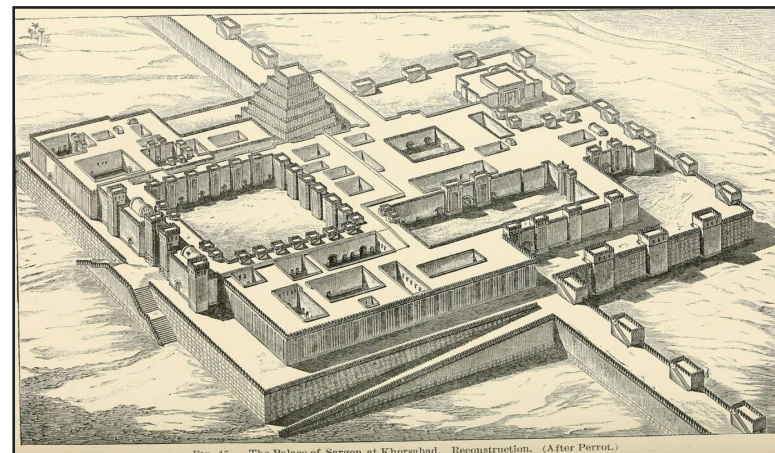
The site, dating back 2,700 years, was originally established as Dur-Sharrukin, or "Fortress of Sargon," by Neo-Assyrian Emperor Sargon II in 713 B.C.

The Neo-Assyrian emperor Sargon II began building a new capital city, named after himself, in the desert of what is now Iraq. For a long time, archaeologists believed that this ambitious project had only just begun when it was abandoned, leaving behind nothing but the remains of a building site. However, a recent survey of the site challenges that notion. The city did indeed flourish outside the palace, as evidenced by visualizations of data from a precision magnetometer that reveal hitherto undiscovered structures and infrastructure inside the city walls.

Sargon II died a few years after work began on Dur-Sharrukin ("Fortress of Sargon"), now called Khorsabad. His son quickly set up his own capital in the city of Nineveh, and for the next 2,500 years, Sargon II's building project was largely forgotten. In the 1800s, French archaeologists rediscovered the site.

Their excavation of Sargon's palace uncovered treasures of Neo-Assyrian art and culture, but teams digging elsewhere in the city came up empty-handed. Archaeologists concluded that the palace was the only building begun within Khorsabad's city walls, which enclose an area more than one mile square (1.7 by 1.7 square kilometers).

In 2017, the French Archaeological Mission in Khorsabad decided to launch a new project to evaluate above-ground damage and conduct the first



geophysical survey of buried remains at the site after Daesh's two-year occupation of Khorsabad officially ended. The survey was expected to uncover the city's water infrastructure, provide fresh insights into the wall fortifications, and perhaps even uncover new signs of habitation outside the palace.

The archaeologists conducted this survey in extremely difficult conditions while buried deep underground. Buried deep underground, the archaeologists underwent extremely tough con-

ditions to conduct this survey. The magnetometer is a device that detects buried structures by mapping subtle changes in the Earth's magnetic field, reports a press release by the American Geophysical Union (AGU), and that makes it an incredibly useful tool for archaeologists seeking to find hidden structures that have been lost for centuries.

Jörg Fassbinder, a geophysicist from Ludwig-Maximilians-University in Munich and the study's lead author, presented the results of this research at

the 2024 American Geophysical Union (AGU) Annual Meeting.

Fassbinder noted, "Every day we discovered something new... all of this was found with no excavation. Excavation is very expensive, so the archaeologists wanted to know in detail what they could expect to achieve by digging. The survey saved time and money. It's a necessary tool before starting any excavation."

When the data were visualized as grayscale images, ghostly outlines emerged of structures as deep as six to ten feet (two to three meters) below ground. The data revealed the location of the city's water gate, possible palace gardens, and five enormous buildings, including a 127-room villa twice the size of the U.S. White House. These and other discoveries are evidence that, at least for some time, Khorsabad was a living city.

Fassbinder's discoveries reveal a bustling urban landscape extending beyond the palace walls, suggesting a vibrant capital teeming with activity.

## Picture of the Day



Taham Dam in Zanzan, northwest Iran.

Photo by ISNA