A remarkable legacy
Edward Granville Browne (1862–1934)

A history of the Persian Revolution 1605–1910 (1913) and The press and poetry of modern Persia (1919). However, his most significant work was his Literary History of Persia, published in four volumes between 1906 and 1924. He states in the preface ‘For many years I have cherished a desire to write a history of the intellectual and literary achievements of the Persians…’ The range and depth of the study has not yet been superseded in a standard work.

Browne was also responsible for compiling the first truly comprehensive catalogue of the Arabic, Persian and Ottoman manuscripts in the Library. Creating his catalogue took eight years in all, it was a painstaking labour of love. I have not only numbered with my own hand the pages of most of the manuscripts but have carried almost every one of them at least once from the Library to my rooms in Pembroke College and back. His catalogue is still in regular use.

Browne’s own manuscript collection started modestly enough with two volumes of Persian poetry, one of which was purchased on his first visit to Constantinople. It eventually grew to almost 500 volumes. The result of the collection, though, was compiled in 1888 during his year of travel in Persia and the time immediately following this and reflects his own personal interests both in medicine and in the religious Babi movement. He bequeathed all his manuscripts and personal papers to the Library.

Browne left a remarkable legacy as a teacher and scholar, as a writer and as a collector and catalogue of manuscripts. The Persian people themselves held him in greatest regard and affection and a street in Tehran remains named after him to this day.

From a religious point of view, Browne’s interest in the Islamic faith focused not on the mainstream orthodoxy but centered rather on the Babi, a religious movement that emerged in Iran in the mid-19th century and eventually split into three groups. With his knowledge of their beliefs, Browne was able to help mediate between the groups during this split. He wrote articles dealing with the sect and published two translations of histories of the Babi movement. His collection of personal papers contains numerous letters to and from religious leaders and important and unique materials on the development of the faith.

Politically, Browne followed the fortunes of the Persian National movement during the Constitutional Period of 1905–1909 with intense sympathy, taking an active part in shaping British opinion. During this period he took steps to influence Britain’s international policies in favour of the Iranian cause. He corresponded directly with Persian state officials whom he invited to his house in Cambridge, and collected much first-hand evidence in the form of newspapers, photographs, maps and letters describing the situation in Iran. For over six years (1908–14) Browne conducted a tireless campaign in the press and in meetings in support of the Persian constitutionalists and against foreign policies relating to Persia, especially the Anglo-Russian agreement of 1907.

When the constitutionalists were defeated, Browne withdrew from the political arena and spent the rest of his life in scholarly pursuits. He devoted two significant volumes to writing its history.
**COMPLEX CHALLENGES: SPECIALIZED SOLUTIONS**

Many of the Islamic manuscripts in the collections are from very early times (over 600 texts date from before 1500) or have been in the Library for a considerable period. The long-term survival of these texts in a good state of repair requires a team of conservators with a thorough knowledge of the traditional materials and original methods used in their construction, and an understanding of the mechanics of their structure. This enables them to devise specific treatments that, as far as possible, preserve the objects' original character.

Islamic manuscripts are constructed using materials and techniques significantly different from their Western counterparts and therefore require unique conservation approaches. One such challenge is the deterioration of the copper-based green pigment used in the past to draw the borders set around the text on the individual pages. As this pigment ages, it becomes corrosive and eats through the paper causing the text panels to break away from the page; meticulous repairs are needed to recreate the pages in their original state. Characteristically the paper itself is blemished and care must be taken to find repair materials that blend successfully with the highly polished character of the original. Another concern is that Islamic manuscripts often have a v-shaped flap, known as a lišān, folding over the fore-edge of the volume, and this may become detached from the rest of the binding. The spine of the volume and the edges of the bindings are also prone to deterioration.

As part of the conservation process, silk gauges, added in an earlier repair process, is removed from a manuscript (Dr. 1287). Tweezers are used and additional assistance is provided by a video enlarger.

The daily activities of the Library's Conservation Department involve controlling the environmental conditions of the storage and exhibition areas, providing book supports for items when they are in use, and even creating made-to-measure storage boxes of archival quality for Islamic manuscripts that are especially vulnerable to damage.

More complex procedures are carried out on items in danger of deterioration. When planning and prioritizing conservation work, and deciding on the level of treatment required, it is essential to take into consideration a complicated array of factors including the existing state of the manuscript, the potential academic interest, projected usage, and time and funding constraints. Increasingly, such decisions are now made in consultation with the need for the digitization of manuscripts, as and when funding permits. This new technology enables access to digital images of the Islamic texts to be made easily available to a larger audience and reduces the amount of handling—and the potential wear and tear—of the original manuscripts. However, ensuring the safety of historical materials during the imaging process poses fresh challenges to the conservator although the goal remains the same: ensuring that the collections are protected for the use and enjoyment of future generations.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Extracts
p. 8. Correspondence respecting the Murder of Professor E. H. Palmer.

p. 20. The Shah nameh of the Persian poet Firdausi,
by James Atkinson

p. 21. Poems from the Divan of Hafiz, translated by Gertrude Lowthian Bell

p. 23. The Loves of Lâl and Majnûn: a Poem from the original Persian of Nizami,
edited by the Rev. J. A. Atkinson


p. 32. Browne, E. G. A year amongst the Persians

Front cover: Miniature painting from Nizami's "Khosrow and Shirin"
(A.12015.11.4, collection E. 79).