

# Consulting Classical Persian Love Poetry

## Research Semester In Shiraz

### Introduction

Hafiz, one of the classical poets in Persian literature from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, plays a prominent role in Iran. Everyone knows him and at least a few of his poems. He lived and died in Shiraz, a city where people generally relate even closer to him and his work. His tomb (*Hafezieh*) is situated in the old part of the city, and is not only frequented by tourists and guests from other cities, but also by the citizens of Shiraz themselves. They will regularly go there to enjoy the garden and the beautiful, old architecture but they will also visit Hafiz, read his poems, and predict their fortunes with the help of his book the '*Diwan-e-Hafiz*'.

### My stay in Shiraz

I spend seven months in Iran to learn Persian and to gain my first field research experience (1. September – 30. March 2017). I developed a research topic in advance and even conducted interviews in Persian after reaching a certain level in my language courses. I took a language course at Shiraz University where I had mostly private lessons of good quality and of diverse content. After an intensive language learning phase of about three months, I started conducting interviews with questions situated around the main question: "What is the meaning of Hafiz in modern Iran?"

### Consulting Hafiz poems

One interesting phenomenon when talking about the meaning of Hafiz in Iran is the so called *fal-e-Hafiz*. *Fal* means divination or fortune telling in Persian and it is a common practice in Iran throughout all ages and social classes: People take the *Diwan* of Hafiz, address Hafiz with certain formulas (e.g. Koran sura), think about their wish or question for their future and open the book randomly. They find an answer in the appearing poem. Not everyone believes in this kind of divination, but it is a widespread practice and is especially present at the tomb of Hafiz in Shiraz.



The tomb of Hafiz (*Hafezieh*) on Nowruz the New Years celebration.



Two examples of Persian calligraphy. Persian poems are mostly written in one of several calligraphy scripts.



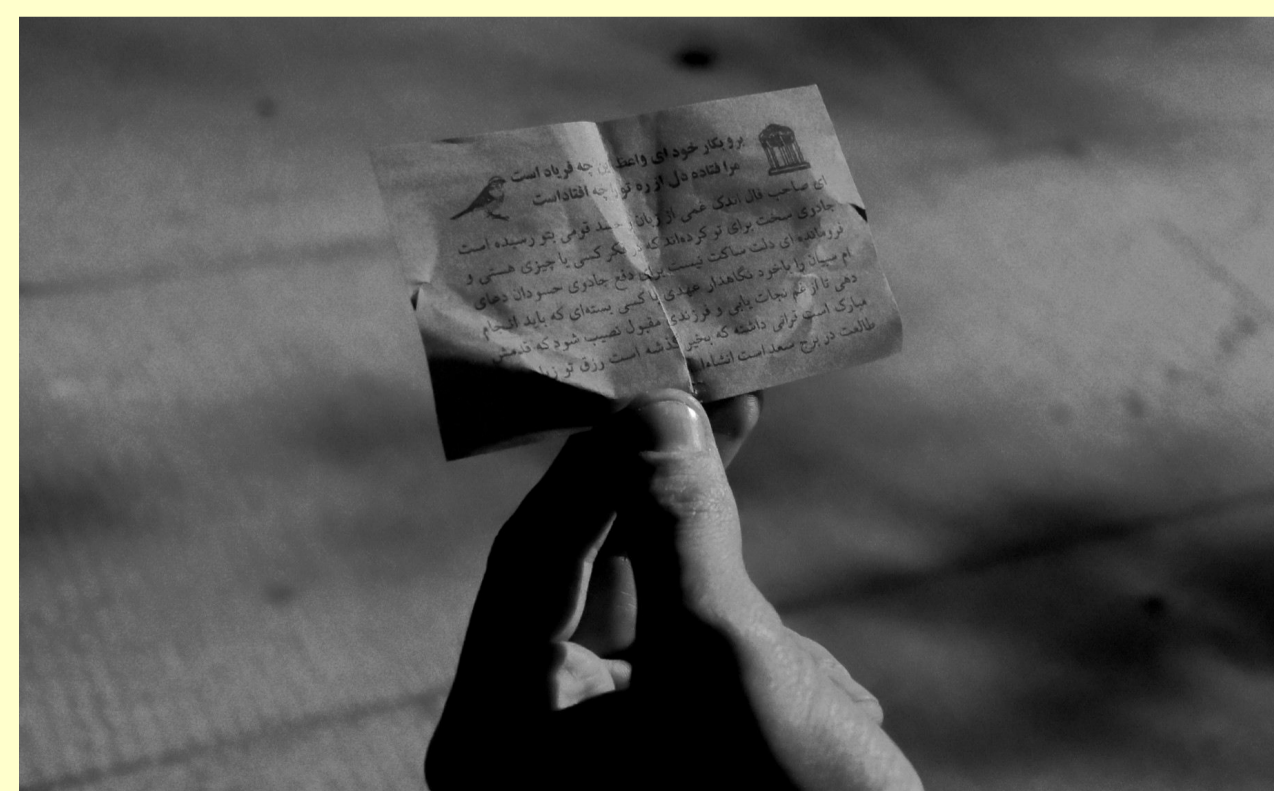
Source: <http://www.lupusinfight.com/2010/11/>

### Further importance of Hafiz

There are many other interesting aspects about the meaning of Hafiz in Iran besides the divination. Poetry, for example, is an integral part of everyday life for many Iranians. Poems are used in discussions and are accepted as valid arguments. One can find poems on small papers or the *Diwan* of Hafiz in most cafes and restaurants, there are many classes and poetry circles where people meet to discuss classical poetry or read out their own poems and critique each other. There is a very wide range of interpretations of Hafiz's poetry, which is very ambiguous due to irony, sarcasm and different ways of interpreting Hafiz's words and sentences. As a result, the approach one takes shows a lot about one's worldview and values. As my Persian teacher Shabnam once stated: "Hafiz is like a mirror".

### Outlook on my master thesis

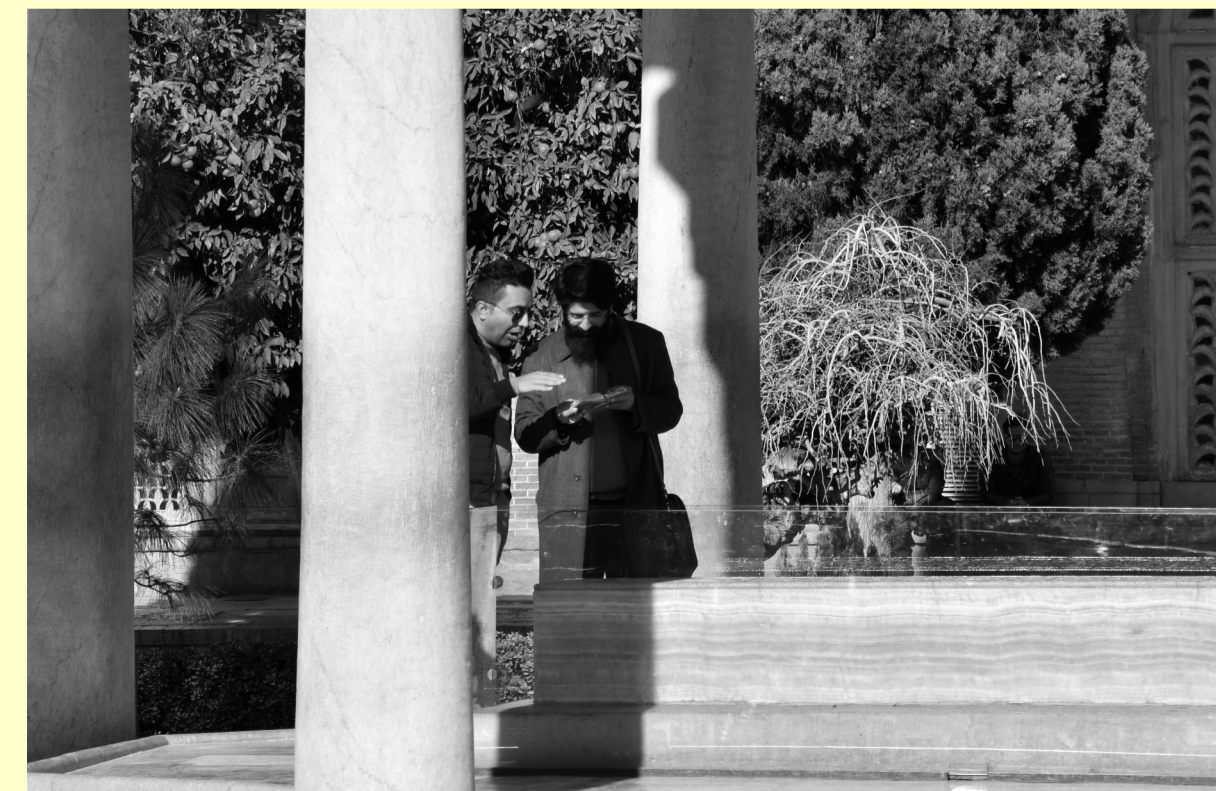
In my Master thesis I am going to describe the *Hafezieh* as a social space where people consult with and contact Hafiz. I will analyze the character of Hafiz, who is dead but not-dead, and the character of the *Hafezieh*, which seems like a pilgrimage site but is not explicitly a pilgrimage site, with the concept of liminality (*the in-between*). I plan to write the main analysis on the practice of fortune telling and the authority that Hafiz and his poems have in conversations by using the theoretical frame of the anthropology of moralities. I will combine this with theories from the field of the anthropology of emotions. The moments in when my informants would read Hafiz's poetry or visit his tomb were closely connected to their mood and had the ability to change feelings such as sadness or anxiety to calmness or hopefulness.



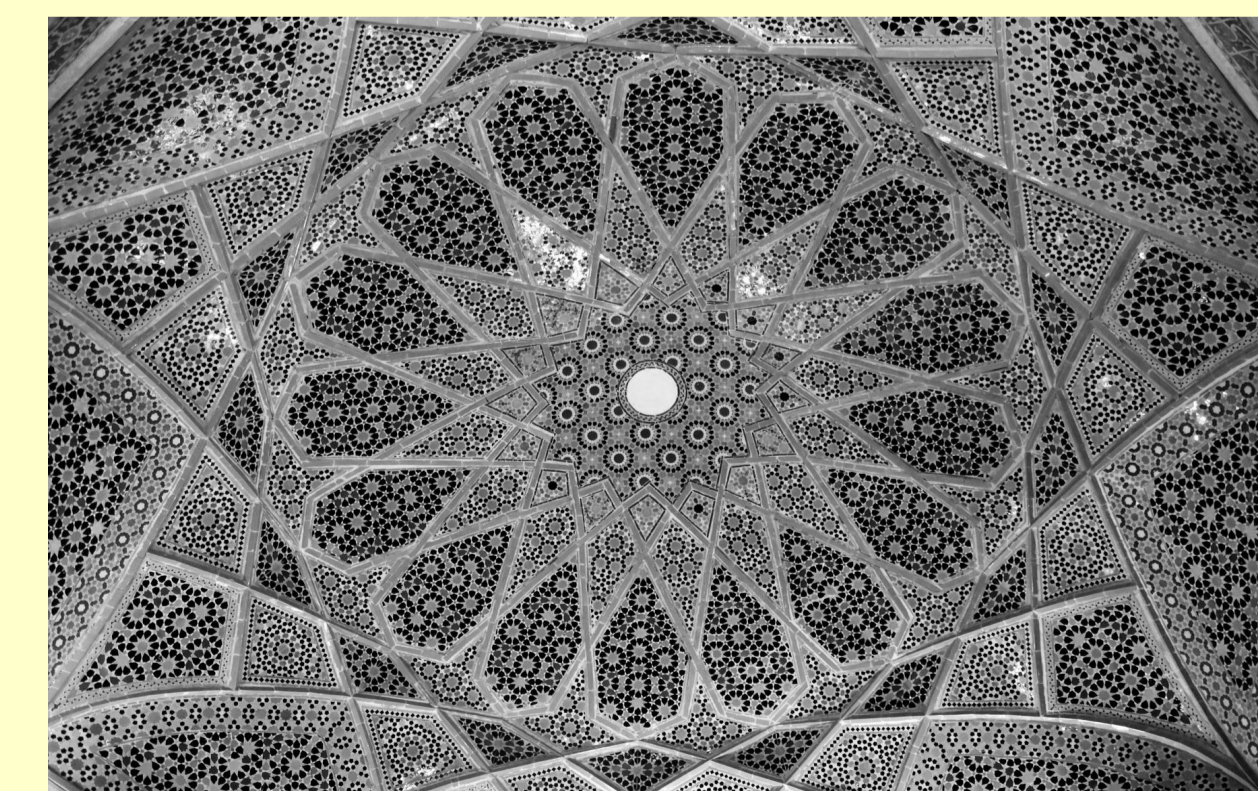
Hafiz's poem on a little colourful paper which is usually picked by a bird and used for divination



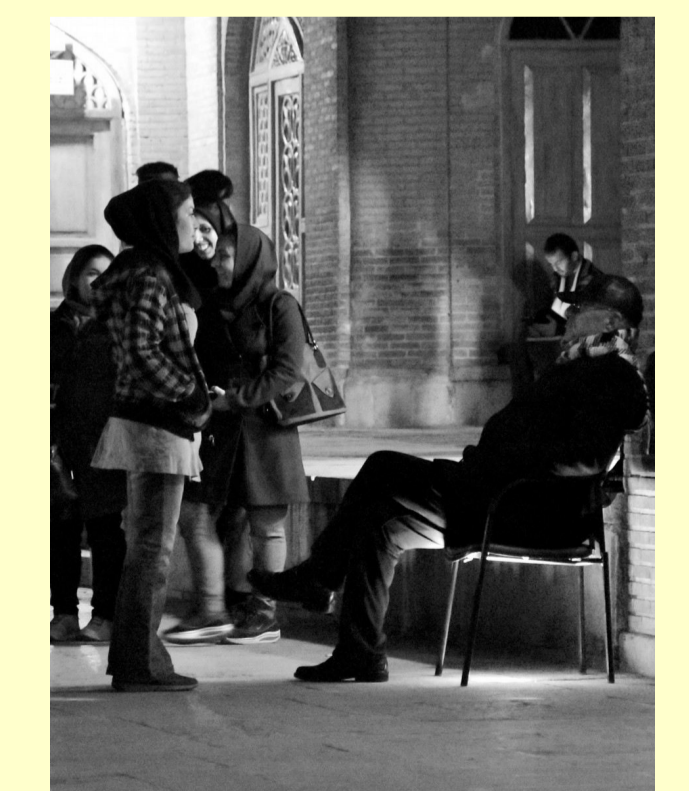
A man is selling *fal-e-Hafiz* in front of the *Hafezieh*. The bird picks the poem(the fortune) for the buyer.



Two men are telling a fortune with the *Diwan* of Hafiz.



The ceiling of the *Hafezieh*, above the tomb of Hafiz. Mostly in blue, black and ochre.



A man is telling fortune with Hafiz's book for a customer.