

*Doctoring the Body and Exciting the Soul: Drugs and consumer culture in medieval and early modern Iran**

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Abstract

This article focuses on the development of early modern consumerism in a part of the Middle East that historians of consumer culture are yet to fully explore. Making use of a wide variety of unexplored and underexplored original sources, the article contends that early modern consumer culture in Iran was grounded deeply in the ever-widening patterns of exchange and use that had developed slowly over the course of the previous centuries. The discussion below takes the growing popular interest in a few key psychoactive substances as a useful barometer of the dynamics of mass consumption, and chronicles how the slow and ever-expanding use of alcohol, opium, and cannabis (or a cannabis-like product) in the medieval period led to the popularity of coffee, tobacco, older drugs, and still other commodities in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The aim here is to use the history of drug culture as an entry point to scrutinize the emergence of early modern consumerism among the elites and the non-elites in both urban and rural areas of the Middle East. In doing so, this article reconstructs the cultural and social history of recreational drugs prior to and during the early modern period, and elucidates the socio-economic context that helped bring about a ‘psychoactive revolution’ in the Safavid state (1501–1736).

Introduction

In the past several decades, historical research on the development of consumer culture has focused mostly on Europe and North America, on

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places like Britain, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Italy, and the United States of America. Early studies in the 1970s and 1980s searched for what Norbert Elias called 'the civilizing process' of imitation through which the bourgeoisie and the popular groups adopted the habits, behaviour, and taste of the aristocratic classes in very specific areas in Europe. The contention was that the growth of demand generated as a result of this cultural imitation led to the 'birth' of consumer society, first, in eighteenth-century Britain.¹ Since the publication of these early works, historians of Europe and America have produced an array of critical accounts which inquire into the historical connections that consumerism had with the unfolding of capitalism, globalization, and democracy, as well as imperialism, slavery, and underdevelopment in the period after 1500. Some have gone so far as to argue that consumerism is behind much of what we associate with the modern world. The importance that was thus attached to the rise of modern consumer culture generated a good deal of interest in its historical roots in world history. As such, careful studies have since shown that the prevalence and circulation of goods were not restricted to the eighteenth century and that a consumer society had already existed in the Netherlands and France in the seventeenth century, in Italy during the Renaissance, or in England in the late medieval period.² Path-breaking and highly suggestive as these accounts tend to be, they nevertheless suffer from at least two major problems. On the one hand, they focus on very specific locations in Europe (or, for that matter, North America) and show little interest in the history of consumer culture in other parts of the world. This absence of a comparative perspective has led scholars to see Europe as the birthplace of modern consumerism either before or after

¹ Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994); Neil McKendrick, 'Home Demand and Economic Growth', in *Historical Perspectives: Studies in English Thought and Society*, ed. Neil McKendrick (London: Europa, 1974); and Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).

² John Brewer and Roy Porter, eds., *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London: Routledge, 1993); Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Daniel Roche, *A History of Everyday Things: The Birth of Consumption in France, 1600–1800*, trans. Brian Pearce (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Evelyn Welch, *Shopping in the Renaissance: Consumer Cultures in Italy, 1400–1600* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); and Christopher Dyer, *An Age of Transition? Economy and Society in England in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

the Industrial Revolution.³ On the other hand, these studies tend to focus on the elites and the wealthy who lived in major cities of Europe. The taste and consumption habits of average people in smaller towns and rural areas (which were more comparable with those of the rest of the world) are often not fully investigated. ‘Save for a few exceptional studies’, as one scholar has recently noted, ‘the history of consumption [in Europe] has remained a history of elites’.⁴

In the past couple of decades, another body of scholarship, much smaller in size, has emerged that focuses on a few non-Western societies in Asia and Africa in order to broaden the scope of the above literature. Centred on the development of consumer culture in the period after 1500, these studies grapple with some of the questions first raised by historians of Europe and North America. The literature on China, for example, shows that the middle Ming period (from 1550 to 1650) witnessed the emergence of a sophisticated culture of consumerism that in many ways rivalled a similar phenomenon in the West just before the Industrial Revolution.⁵ Historians of Southeast Asia too have followed suit and have demonstrated a pattern of increasing consumption in the early modern period, especially during the seventeenth century.⁶ The literature on Africa, on the other hand, has revealed how imperialism, capitalism, and industrial production in the West informed and were in turn shaped by the taste and habits of

³ When historical studies of consumer culture in the West do look to other parts of the world for the purpose of comparison, the analysis and arguments are often tendentious and polemical; they tend to portray consumerism in Europe both before and after the Industrial Revolution as far more developed than that in any other parts of the world. This is perhaps illustrated best in the work of S. A. M. Adshead, which compares the material culture in China with that in Europe in the period between 1400 and 1800. The author concludes that the degree of consumerism was far greater ‘in Europe [throughout this period] because it [that is, consumer culture in Europe] was rooted in Christian materialism’—a claim not quite substantiated in Adshead’s study; S. A. M. Adshead, *Material Culture in Europe and China, 1400–1800* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 1.

⁴ Ina Baghdiantz McCabe, *A History of Global Consumption, 1500–1800* (London: Routledge, 2015), 3.

⁵ Craig Clunas, *Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992); Craig Clunas, *Fruitful Sites: Garden Culture in Ming Dynasty China* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996); Craig Clunas, *Pictures and Visuality in Early Modern China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); and Timothy Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁶ See, for example, Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450–1680*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988–93).

men and women across the continent.⁷ Such preoccupation with the study of consumerism in several different parts of the modern world has sparked the interest of scholars of the Middle East in the subject as well. Ottoman historians, most notably, have pointed out that an early modern consumer culture can be seen in the region, first with the popularity of tobacco and coffee in the seventeenth century, then with the rise of interest in tulips and Indian textiles in the eighteenth century, and finally with the massive popular use of European imports and domestic Ottoman manufactures in the nineteenth century.⁸

Although the literature on the non-Western world is impressive, it too remains uneven and underdeveloped. First, there are many places across Asia and Africa that we know very little about. Iran, the focus of the present discussion, for instance, has by and large remained outside the purview of the new scholarly interest in consumer society.⁹ These studies also focus almost entirely on the period after 1500. Whether or how the birth of a modern consumer culture in early modern times could be understood against the backdrop of rising demand in the previous centuries is often overlooked as a point of inquiry. The continuities from the medieval period are particularly important in the context of the Middle East because the region was at the centre of commercial exchange between China, India, and Southeast Asia, on the one hand, and the four corners of Europe and Africa, on the other.¹⁰ That the region had highly developed urban centres and experienced a good deal of economic prosperity in the period before 1500 was crucial for the emergence of popular demand for different types of goods made domestically or exotic products from distant lands.¹¹ Inspired in part to

⁷ Ann McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995); and Jeremy Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

⁸ See a set of case studies in Donald Quataert, ed., *Consumption Studies and the History of the Ottoman Empire, 1550–1922: An Introduction* (New York: State University of New York, 2000).

⁹ One notable exception is Pamela Karimi, *Domesticity and Consumer Culture in Iran: Interior Revolutions of the Modern Era* (London: Routledge, 2013), which focuses on the twentieth century.

¹⁰ On the importance of the Middle East in global exchange in the medieval period, see Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

¹¹ This point—the need to understand the cultural and economic developments of world societies prior to the modern period—is stressed by a handful of scholars including Marshall Sahlins, who notes: ‘Western capitalism has loosed on the world enormous forces of production, coercion, and destruction. Yet precisely because they

address this historiographical gap, the present discussion explicates the development of early modern consumerism in a part of the Middle East that scholars are yet to fully explore. The article contends that early modern consumer culture in the region was grounded deeply in the ever-widening patterns of exchange and use that had developed slowly over the course of the previous centuries. We shall take the growing popular interest in a few key psychoactive substances as a useful window on the world of mass consumption and chronicle how the slow and ever-widening use of alcohol, opium, and cannabis (or a cannabis-like product) in the medieval period led to the popularity of coffee, tobacco, older drugs, and still other commodities in early modern times. The aim here is to use the history of drug culture as an entry point to scrutinize the emergence of modern consumerism among the elites and the non-elites in both urban and rural areas of the Middle East in this period.

Historians of the early modern world often showcase the popular use of recreational drugs in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as part and parcel of a worldwide ‘psychoactive revolution’ that in and of itself contributed much to the development of capitalism, globalization, imperialism, and above all the structure of the modern state in Europe and North America. The history of sugar, coffee, tobacco, tea, opium, cocoa, and other drugs and stimulants has been shown to be connected deeply with not only the emergence of consumer society, the Industrial Revolution, and the ever-expanding global market, but also the formation of the modern political apparatus and the changing patterns of taste and values in the West. Some have, for example, claimed that these drugs brought about cultural, social, and economic processes that eventually led to more fluid social boundaries and the formation of a bourgeois public sphere.¹² Marshall Sahlins encapsulated the main

cannot be resisted, the relations and goods of the larger system also take on meaningful places in local schemes of things. In the event, the historical changes in local society are also continuous with the superseded cultural scheme, even as the new state of affairs acquires a cultural coherence of a distinct kind. So we shall have to examine how indigenous peoples struggle to integrate their experience of the world system in something that is logically and ontologically more inclusive: their own system of the world’; Marshall Sahlins, ‘Cosmologies of Capitalism: The Trans-Pacific Sector of “The World System”’, in *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, ed. Nicholas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley, and Sherry B. Ortner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 413.

¹² See, for instance, David T. Courtwright, *Forces of Habit: Drugs and the Making of the Modern World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Sidney W. Mintz,

contention of some of this literature when he noted: ‘The development of modern Western “civilization” has depended on an enormous soft-drug culture, at least as a condition of tolerability, marked by the daily general consumption of such substances as tea, coffee, chocolate, tobacco, and sugar—a list without much redeeming nutritious value’.¹³ The importance attached to the history of recreational drugs in the West has prompted historians of the rest of the world to follow suit and scrutinize the social life of these substances in an attempt to open up the scholarly discussion to other regions of the globe. Their findings reveal that some of the same processes identified by historians of Europe and North America were also at work in several other parts of the world including China and the Ottoman empire.¹⁴ Just as is the case with the scholarship on consumer culture, what is missing in this literature is whether and in what ways the ‘modern’ phenomena unleashed by these drugs depended on patterns of consumption that had evolved in the earlier centuries. In fact, the history of tobacco or coffee—two key elements of the early modern psychoactive revolution—is often presented in a manner that implies their popularity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had little to do with the earlier history of drug use in a given region.

Engaging with the above literature and addressing its principal gap, this article historicizes the development of recreational drug culture and economy in Iran over the course of the medieval and early modern periods. In reconstructing the cultural and social history of a few

Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History (New York: Penguin Books, 1985); and Matthew Romaniello and Tricia Starks, eds., *Tobacco in Russian History and Culture: The Seventeenth Century to the Present* (London: Routledge, 2011).

¹³ Sahlins, ‘Cosmologies of Capitalism’, 439.

¹⁴ James Grehan, ‘Smoking and “Early Modern” Sociability: The Great Tobacco Debate in the Ottoman Middle East (Seventeenth to Eighteenth Centuries)’, *The American Historical Review* 111.5 (December 2006): 1352–1377; James Grehan, *Everyday Life and Consumer Culture in 18th-Century Damascus* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 135–155; Dana Sajdi, *Ottoman Tulips, Ottoman Coffee: Leisure and Lifestyle in the Eighteenth Century* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014); Carol Benedict, *Golden-silk Smoke: A History of Tobacco in China, 1550–2010* (Berkeley: University of California, 2011); and William Gervase Clarence-Smith and Steven Topik, eds., *The Global Coffee Economy in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, 1500–1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). See also Ralph S. Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses: The Origins of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Near East* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985); Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff, *Colonising Plants in Bihar (1760–1950): Tobacco Betwixt Indigo and Sugarcane* (n.p.: Partridge Publishing, 2014); and Steven C. Rubert, *A Most Promising Weed: A History of Tobacco Farming and Labor in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1890–1945* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1998).

recreational substances, the article establishes that, even before the introduction of global drugs in the early modern period, the region under discussion had an elaborate consumer culture revolving around the mass production and popular use of several older stimulants. This economic and social environment not only absorbed new and foreign drugs such as coffee and tobacco; it anchored them in much older consumption patterns. The new substances, in other words, merged into the consumer culture of much older but still increasingly popular drugs such as alcohol, opium, and cannabis (or a cannabis-like product) when people started to consume them together or replace one with the other. In surveying the history of recreational substances prior to and during the early modern period, the discussion below expounds on the socio-economic context that helped the new drugs acquire prominence in the household economy of many different social groups—including the poor and the dispossessed—in both urban and rural areas of Safavid Iran (1501–1736). Making use of a wide variety of unexplored and underexplored primary sources, the article takes the discussion on stimulants as a helpful test case to get a better sense of the process that brought about a new form of consumerism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹⁵

¹⁵ This research is indebted to the previous studies of recreational drugs in Iranian and Middle Eastern history, the most notable of which is Rudi Mathee, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Drugs and Stimulants in Iranian History, 1500–1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). For other studies on the history of wine in Iran, see Ehsan Yarshater, ‘The Theme of Wine-drinking and the Concept of the Beloved in Early Persian Poetry’, *Studia Islamica* 13 (1960): 43–63; Ali Saeidi and Tim Unwin, ‘Persian Wine Tradition and Symbolism: Evidence from the Medieval Poetry of Hafiz’, *Journal of Wine Research* 15.2 (2004): 97–114; Nasrollah Pourjavady, ‘Love and the Metaphors of Wine and Drunkenness in Persian Sufi Poetry’, in *Metaphor and Imagery in Persian Poetry*, ed. Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 125–136; and Bert G. Fagner, Ralph Kauz, and Florian Schwarz, eds., *Wine Culture in Iran and Beyond* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2014). On the history of tobacco, see Ahmad Kasravi, *Tarikhcha-yi chupuq va ghalyan* (Tehran: Daftar-i Parcham, 1944); Ibrahim Pur-Davud, *Hurmuzdnama* (Tehran: Anjuman-i Iranshinashi, 1952), 190–219; Nasr Allah Falsafi, ‘Shah ‘Abbas-i Buzurg ba taryak va tanbaku mukhalif bud’, *Sukhan* 4.6 (1954): 443–450; Muhammad Hasan Simsar, ‘Nazari bih paydayish-i qalyan va chupuq dar Iran’, *Hunar va mardum*, new series 17 (1964): 14–25; Willem Floor, ‘Copoq’, *Encyclopedia Iranica*; Shahnaz Razpush and Encyclopedia Iranica, ‘Galyan’, *Encyclopedia Iranica*; Willem Floor, ‘The Art of Smoking in Iran and Other Uses of Tobacco’, *Iranian Studies* 35 (2002): 47–85; Rasul Ja’fariyan, ‘Tanbaku va nazar-i fuqaha’ darbara-yi an’, *Tarikh va farhang-i mu’asir* 4.3–4 (Winter 1996): 264–268; and Ranin Kazemi, ‘Tobacco, Eurasian

The high and low culture of drinking

The lands that came to constitute the Safavid state in the sixteenth century had a long history of exposure to recreational drugs. As we shall see further below, in this region, several psychoactive substances were in common use throughout much of the medieval period. One of these popular drugs was alcohol, which was consumed in different ways by a variety of people and social classes. The broader area associated with the Iranian plateau was one of the first places in the world wherein wine was produced and consumed. This has been demonstrated in recent archaeological excavations which confirm that wine making took place in the Zagros Mountains as early as 3100–2900 BCE.¹⁶ Written historical records indicate as well that viticulture flourished in the Persian lands in ancient and pre-Islamic times. We know, based on a variety of Iranian sources, that the consumption of wine in royal courts and elite circles was quite extensive in this period.¹⁷ Foreign observers

Trade, and the Early Modern Iranian Economy', *Iranian Studies* 49.4 (July 2016): 613–633. On opium, see A. R. Neligan, *The Opium Question with Special Reference to Persia* (London: John Bale, Sons and Danielsson, Ltd., 1927); Ram Baruch Regavim, 'The Most Sovereign of Masters: The History of Opium in Modern Iran, 1850–1955' (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2012); S. Shahnavaaz, 'Afyun', *Encyclopedia Iranica*; and Maryam Sadiqi, 'Taryak', *Danishnama-yi buzurg-i Islami*. On coffee, see Aladin Goushegir, 'Le Café et les cafés en Iran, des Safavides à l'époque actuelle', in *Cafés d'Orient revisités*, ed. Hélène Desmet-Grégoire and François Georgeon (Paris: CNRS Editions, 1997), 141–176; Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses*; 'Ali Al-i Dawud, 'Coffee', *Encyclopedia Iranica*; C. Van Arendonk, 'Kahwa', *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd edition; and Nasr Allah Falsafi, 'Tarikh-i qahva va qahvakhana dar Iran', *Sukhan* 5 (1954): 260. On cannabis, see Franz Rosenthal, *The Herb: Hashish versus Medieval Muslim Society* (Leiden: Brill, 1971); G. Gnoli, 'Bang', *Encyclopedia Iranica*; and Hushang A'lam, Mihran Afshar, and Murtiza Karimi-Niya, 'Bang', *Danishnama-yi jahan-i Islam*.

¹⁶ Patrick E. McGovern, *Ancient Wine: The Search for the Origins of the Viticulture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 64–67; Patrick E. McGovern, 'Iranian Wine at the "Dawn of Viticulture"', in *Wine Culture in Iran*, 11–21; and Saeidi and Unwin, 'Persian Wine', 101.

¹⁷ See, for example, *The Zend-Avesta: Part I, The Vendidad*, trans. James Darmesteter (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1880), 62–63, 90, 99, 172. See also Jenny Rose, 'Gender', in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism*, ed. Michael Stausberg and Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina with Anna Tessmann (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 285; William W. Malandra, ed., *An Introduction to Ancient Iranian Religion: Readings from the Avesta and the Achaemenid Inscriptions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 174; Matt Waters, *Ancient Persia: A Concise History of the Achaemenid Empire, 550–330 BCE* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 52, 106, 107, 123; and Ernst E. Herzfeld, *Archaeological History of Iran* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935), 50–51.

also testified that a fully developed economy of wine consumption was already in place in this area by the second century BCE. Chinese sources, for example, stress that ‘the grape, in like manner as alfalfa, and the art of making wine were encountered [for the first time] by the Chinese strictly among peoples of Aryan descent, principally of the Iranian family’.¹⁸ In one case, we hear of the Chinese General Zhang Qian, who observed that, in the course of his travels through the eastern parts of Parthian Iran—that is, Fergana, Sogdiana, and Bactria—in 128 BCE, he witnessed what appears to have been a well-established culture of wine making and consumption. He explained that ‘the wealthy among the people of Fergana stored grape-wine in large quantity up to ten thousand gallons for a long time, keeping it for several decades without risk of deterioration; they were fond of drinking wine in the same manner as their horses relished alfalfa’.¹⁹ This evidently common, or even excessive, use of alcohol continued among many different sectors of society in later centuries.

With the arrival and expansion of Islam,²⁰ whose mainstream interpretations discouraged, if not completely banned, the consumption of alcoholic beverages,²¹ certain social and legal constraints may have hampered the popularity of wine and other alcoholic beverages among some social groups in the Iranian lands.²² Ample evidence from the

¹⁸ Berthold Laufer, *Sino-Iranica: Chinese Contributions to the History of Civilization in Ancient Iran* (Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, 1999), 221.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*; and Christopher Brunner, ‘Geographical and Administrative Divisions: Settlements and Economy’, in *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 3, part 2, *The Seleucid, Parthian, and Sasanian Periods*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 738–739. See also Peter Kupfer, ‘Rethinking the History of China’s Grape Wine Culture’, in *Wine Culture in Iran*, 23–42; and Ulf Jäger, ‘Wine on the Northern Silk Road in Pre-Islamic Times’, in *Wine Culture in Iran*, 43–51.

²⁰ The expansion of Islam in the seventh century did not entail an immediate mass conversion of people on the Iranian plateau. The process of adopting the new faith—and thus upholding its moral precepts—took close to two centuries or more. On this point, see Richard Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

²¹ Certain strands within Islam have always maintained that the teachings of this faith do not reject the consumption of alcohol categorically. In addition, legal and religious scholars of Islam have always disagreed over the permissibility of non-alcoholic psychoactive drugs such as opium. On this matter, see, for example, Matthee, *The Pursuit*, 38–39; and Saeidi and Unwin, ‘Persian Wine’, 98–100.

²² A *hadith* (namely a reported saying from the prophet of Islam) seems to indicate that Muhammad warned early Muslims against the Persian wine. It is possible that the *hadith* in question is a forgery that dates to the early centuries of Islam but a period after the death of

medieval period, however, indicates that many people continued to produce and drink alcohol. In fact, as one historian has recently pointed out, '[a]part from the 'ulama' [that is, the religious scholars] and orthodox Muslims, wine drinking [along with indulging in other alcoholic beverages] was not viewed as a negative activity by [Iranian] society in general [in the period] prior to the Mongol invasion' in the thirteenth century.²³ That alcohol continued to be quite popular in the early centuries of Islam is demonstrated by many contemporary sources. One author who wrote about the culture of drinking in this period was, for instance, the eminent Arabo-Persian poet Abu Nuwas al-Hakami (756–814) who was part of the Persian-influenced milieu of Iraq in the eighth and ninth centuries. The poetry of Abu Nuwas celebrated wine drinking, pederasty, hunting, and other worldly pleasures that were an aspect of a meaningful life for him and many like him in the early days of Islam.²⁴ The Bacchic wine poetry (*khamriyyat*) of Abu Nuwas, which was composed in Arabic, was read widely in Iran and soon came to serve as inspiration for many Persian writers who were based in royal courts and were equally preoccupied with wine and other worldly pleasures.²⁵ Some examples of this earliest of medieval Persian literature has been analysed by one scholar who has emphasized that Persian poetry from the tenth and eleventh centuries is replete with wine imagery and explicit references to drinking bouts:

Glorification of wine and drinking scenes is ... one of the major themes of early Persian poetry. Descriptions are direct, vivid, and refreshingly varied. Generally, the poet speaks with knowledge and authority on the subject, and his delightfully appealing delineation reveals that sensuous quality so characteristic of Persian art. Many valuable details bearing of the drinking institution at [royal] courts, not recorded elsewhere, can be gathered from the poetry of the tenth and eleventh centuries.²⁶

the prophet. Be that as it may, the *hadith* suggests wider familiarity with the Persian wine and its evident currency in medieval Muslim society. On this, see Rosenthal, *The Herb*, 46; and Stefanie Brinkmann, 'Wine in Hadith—from Intoxication to Sobriety', in *Wine Culture in Iran*, 71–135.

²³ Willem Floor, 'The Culture of Wine Drinking in Pre-Mongol Iran', in *Wine Culture in Iran*, 202.

²⁴ Philip Kennedy, *Abu Nuwas: A Genius of Poetry* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005).

²⁵ Floor, 'The Culture of Wine Drinking', 174–177. References to wine under such key terms as 'bada', 'sharab', 'miy', 'mul', 'nabid', 'khamr', and the like are quite numerous in the works of just about any Persian poet in the medieval and early modern periods.

²⁶ Yarshater, 'The Theme of Wine-drinking', 44–45.

The writings of Abu Nuwas and the poets who followed him, in other words, reveal in no ambiguous terms that court poets and their regal patrons in the early centuries of Islam were preoccupied with drinking. This was in fact an indispensable element of their shared culture inherited from pre-Islamic times.²⁷

Historical records in the medieval period go beyond the habits of the literati and the ruling elites, however. We have, for example, a variety of sources that emphasize the consumption of alcohol among other social groups such as the wealthy notables, the antinomian Sufis, the working-class population, some learned legal and religious scholars of Islam, and the non-Muslim communities which did not have religious or legal reasons to refrain from drinking.²⁸ Many references to wine in the medieval period occur, in the first place, in the didactic literature of the *Fürstenspiegel* ('mirrors for princes'). This advice literature was produced often for the education and edification of young princes, notable families, and religious audiences. A typical early example of this genre is the famous eleventh-century *Qabusnama*, which was composed by the ruler of a small principality in northern Iran. In a key section of the book, the author wrote about alcohol consumption and discouraged his son (who was his primary reader) from drinking. He explained:

As for drinking wine, I will not say that you should drink, nor can I say that you should not. For the youths do not refrain from acting as youths based on the advice given by someone [older]. I too was advised on numerous occasions, and I too did not listen until I passed fifty years of age But [if you are to drink,

²⁷ For specific references to drinking in court, see, for example, Abu al-Fazl Bayhaqi, *Tarikh-i Bayhaqi*, ed. Muhammad Ja'far Yahaqqi and Mahdi Sayyidi, vol. 1 (Tehran: Sukhan, 2009), 561, 679, 699–700; and Khvaja Nizam al-Mulk Tusi, *Siyasatnama*, ed. 'Abbas Iqbal (Tehran: Asatir, 2001), 149–150. A typical occurrence of wine in Persian poetry may be found in Edward G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Goodword Books, 2002), 462. See also Floor, 'The Culture of Wine Drinking', 165–204. The culture of wine drinking in the early sixteenth century is succinctly described in Stephen F. Dale, *The Garden of Eight Paradises: Babur and the Culture of Empire in Central Asia, Afghanistan and India (1483–1530)* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 50. See also Mathee, *The Pursuit*, 37–41, where the author describes the early history of wine drinking.

²⁸ In the case of the wealthy notables and elites, see, for instance, Kaykavus b. Iskandar b. Qabus, *Qabusnama*, ed. Ghulam-Husayn Yusufi (Tehran: 'Ilmi va Farhangi, 1994), 67–70; and Nizam al-Mulk, *Siyasatnama*, 149–150. In the case of the non-Muslim communities, see examples given in Sarah Bowen Savant, *The New Muslims of Post-conquest Iran: Tradition, Memory, and Conversion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 226; and Stausberg, *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism*, 434, 473. In the case of the other social groups, see various examples given throughout this article.

you should] begin drinking mulled wine around the evening prayer, so that by the time you are fully intoxicated it would be dark, and people would not see your drunkenness And do not attend too many [drinking parties] in the countryside or in the [suburban] gardens. But if you do go [to those functions], do not drink mulled wine. Return to your house and get drunk at your own house. For what you can do in the privacy of your house, you cannot do in the open.²⁹

What an excerpt such as this allows us to see is how conflicted some people's opinion and attitude were when it came to the consumption of alcohol. Drinking did not necessarily negate one's piety, but there was concern over excessive drinking and appearing intoxicated in public. These words suggest as well how inevitable drinking was for the notables and the lesser elites of certain age group in medieval Iran. The casual reference to the countryside and suburban gardens where feasts and entertainment were arranged and Bacchic festivities took place shows, too, a wider culture of drinking in which distinguished personalities of a given area often participated. Other sources confirm these points.³⁰

Moving beyond the political and social elites, we see that some Sufis and mystically oriented communities were likewise attached to alcohol in the medieval period. Contemporary evidence for this phenomenon is similarly quite extensive. But a good place to start is the writings of the thirteenth-century poet Muslih al-Din Shirazi (1210–91), better known as Sa'di. One of the astute social critics of medieval Iran, the author suggested in several instances in his work that drinking wine was not infrequent among the wayfarers of the mystical path. In one story from his *Bustan*, for example, we learn about a person who finds some Sufis accustomed to intoxication. Out of religious zeal, the protagonist tries to expose the Sufis to the public by broadcasting their supposed vice. He goes around the city, and draws people's attention to the Sufis: 'Take note of these Sufis who have drunk wine. / They have [even] pawned their rags to obtain mulled wine'. Ordinary as it seems to have been for some mystics to drink, the generality of people do not attach any weight to this news and in fact ignore the main character's

²⁹ Kaykavus b. Iskandar, *Qabusnama*, 67–70.

³⁰ See especially the local histories of various regions in the eastern Islamic caliphate (that is, the Iranian lands) such as Sistan, Qum, and Tabaristan: Malik al-Shu'ara' Bahar, ed., *Tarikh-i Sistan* (Tehran: Khavar, 1935), 125, 146, 275, 279, 315; Hasan b. Muhammad Ash'ari Qumi, *Tarikh-i Qum*, ed. Muhammad-Riza Ansari Qumi (Qum: Kitabkhana-yi Mar'ashi Najafi, 2006), 558–560; and Zahir al-Din b. Nasir al-Din Mar'ashi, *Tarikh-i Tabaristan va Ruyan va Mazandaran*, ed. Muhammad-Husayn Tasbihi (Tehran: Sharq, 1966), 27, 176, 257.

overzealous public shaming. As the protagonist continues to magnify what he considers to be the grievous sins of the Sufis, he is himself exposed and shunned in the city for his preoccupation with other people's purported transgressions.³¹ References such as this which abound in the religious, mystical, and didactic literature of the medieval period show two things at once. They indicate, on the one hand, that wine and other alcoholic beverages were not always understood as spiritual drinks, but that some Sufis enjoyed both earthly and other-worldly intoxication. On the other hand, we get a sense that the generality of people who often interacted with these Sufis displayed remarkable acceptance of intoxication in public.

To illustrate this point further, we may refer to another example, this time a story from *Tazkira al-awliya*' of Farid al-Din 'Attar Nishaburi (1145–1220)—one of the well-known of the early hagiographers of Sufi saints. In this anecdote, we hear about the life of a great Sufi master, identified as Shaykh Abu 'Ali Daqqaq, who had a popular *khanaqah* (Sufi retreat) and a large number of disciples and students around him:

It has been reported that there was a beer seller (*mardi fuqqā'i*) standing at the door of the *khanaqah* [of the master]. He would often come at the time of the meal, bring some of his beer, sit at the table, and give his beer to the Sufis. When everyone was full, the beer seller would then take the food that was left over with him [to his house]. One day, the master [snubbed the beer seller and] mentioned that 'this young man has [such] good timing' [implying that he comes to the gathering only for food]. That very night the master [happened to] see him [that is, the beer seller] in a dream. 'I saw a lofty place', he explained [later], 'where the [great] pillars [that is, personalities] of the sacred and the temporal worlds had all congregated', 'There was [yet] another elevated place between me and them. When I tried to climb the [latter] elevated place [in an attempt to join the gathering of the sacred or saved souls], an obstacle came in front of me which did not let me go up to that place. Suddenly, the beer seller appeared [out of nowhere] and said, "O Bu 'Ali! Give me your hand because in this path lions [that is, people such as you] follow after foxes [that is, people such as me]"!' The next day [after this revelatory dream], the master was on the pulpit and the beer seller came into the door. 'Let him come in', the master said [to the crowd], 'because if he had not helped me last night, we were among the lost [souls]'. 'O master'! retorted the beer seller, 'We have been going to that [lofty] place every night. One night that you came by, [how is it that] you should [publicly] disgrace us [by exposing us in this way]!'³²

³¹ Muslih al-Din Sa'di, *Kulliyat-i Sa'di*, ed. Muhammad-'Ali Furughi (Tehran: Hirmis, 2006), 459–460.

³² Farid al-Din 'Attar Nishaburi, *Tazkira al-awliya*', ed. Muhammad Isti'lami (Tehran: Zuvvar, 1976), 648–649.

The moral and spiritual significance of it aside, the story suggests several things about the culture of drinking in medieval Iran. It reveals that the consumption of beer and, by implication, other alcoholic beverages was not uncommon among Sufis and saints in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries. It shows as well that selling beer in close proximity to a popular religious institution and as a result close interactions between a beer seller, his customers, and Sufi students and devotees were not considered religiously or spiritually questionable practices. The account illustrates, furthermore, that, besides wine, there were cheaper drinks such as beer (*fūqqa*) which average people enjoyed on a daily basis. In different ways, both of the stories cited above demonstrate as well that piety, spirituality, and alcohol were not perceived as contradictory by the many people who read these popular works or interacted with intoxicated Sufis throughout their lives.

Going beyond the literature on Sufis, we have historical evidence that points to the routine consumption of wine among ordinary people. The fourteenth-century iconoclastic poet and satirist Nizam al-Din 'Ubayd Zakani (1300–71), for example, implied in many of his vivid depictions of the everyday life of different groups in society that wine consumption was not infrequent among the elites, the Sufis, and the commoners alike. In one anecdote, the author mocked a 'typical' youth from Khurasan who was interested in wine so much that he neglected filial duty:

The father of a person from Khurasan fell into a well and died. He was with a group of people enjoying wine. Someone went [to the party] and told him, 'Your father has fallen into a well'. He did not wish to retire from the drinking party (*majlis*). He responded by saying, 'No worries! Men fall into all sorts of places'. They [then] told him, 'He [that is, your father] has died [in fact]'. 'By God!' he returned, 'Even a [strong] he-lion dies [at some point]'. 'Come', they said, 'so that we [can] bring him out [of the well]'. 'He is quite heavy', he retorted. 'Come', they insisted, 'so that we can bury him [and discharge our duty]'. 'There is no need for me', he countered, 'Even if he is as valuable as pure gold [conventional norms appear to have implied this by stressing respect and reverence for one's father and his body after death], I have full confidence in all of you. Go and bury him [on your own]'.³³

Notwithstanding the critical tone of the anecdote and its overarching purpose which was didactic and thus dismissing of the behaviour of the protagonist, the story suggests that consumption of alcohol was by no means limited to the parties of the elites and the Sufis. Ordinary and

³³ Nizam al-Din 'Ubayd Zakani, *Kullīyyat-i 'Ubayd-i Zakani*, ed. Muhammad Ja'far Mahjub (New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press, 1999), 276, 283, 296, 311, 419.

nameless people, especially the youth, were avid consumers of wine (and other alcoholic beverages) as well.

This sentiment is shared in other historical writings that afford glimpses of the everyday life of average people. In many of these sources, we have the repeated reference to *fuqqa'*, which was a cheap carbonated alcoholic beverage that was made from barley or raisins and that was drunk cold. *Fuqqa'* was evidently a favourite beverage of the middling and lower classes in society, while its distribution and sale appear to have been controlled by the working and underclass population. This point is, for example, illustrated in a story cited in *Chahar maqala* of Nizami Samarqandi (fl. 1110–61)—a notable and learned author of the twelfth century. The narrative gives the oft-repeated and well-known account of the mistreatment of the epic poet Abu al-Qasim Firdawsi (940–1020) by his contemporary and sometime patron Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna (r. 1002–30). We are told that, when the king was displeased with the completion of the renowned poet's magnum opus, he sent an insignificant sum, by way of a regal gift, to Firdawsi. The award was meant to be an insult and perhaps even a veiled threat rather than well-deserved recognition of the decades-long endeavour Firdawsi had undertaken to complete his monumental work. The story goes that, upon receiving the news that he was humiliated and censured by a paltry sum of 20,000 silver dirhams, Firdawsi 'was very distressed'. Still he collected the award out of courtesy or more likely because of concern over his own safety. 'He then proceeded to the [local] bathhouse, washed himself, drank some ale (*fuqqa'i*), and then distributed that award money between the bath attendant and the beer seller' who was based inside the bathhouse.³⁴ The great poet is said to have then fled from his native land in order to evade capture and likely abuse. In this anecdote, the casual mention of the beer seller at the local bathhouse, just like the beer seller at the door of the local *khanaqah* noted earlier, suggests that the sale and consumption of this beverage were not unusual phenomena in towns and cities of medieval Iran. The reference to these public spaces where people of different walks of life gathered frequently to clean, pray, and socialize indicates as well that the elites and the non-elites both partook in the consumption of this beverage.

³⁴ Ahmad b. 'Umar b. 'Ali Nizami Samarqandi, *Chahar maqala*, ed. Muhammad Qazvini and Muhammad Mu'in (Tehran: Armaghan, 1995²), 78.

That *fūqqa* was an ordinary part of the everyday life of many different social groups is also attested in other contemporary accounts. In one story from *Mantiq al-tayr* by ‘Attar Nishaburi, for instance, we learn about a respected and wealthy man who falls in love with a ‘child’—or more likely a ‘teenage’—‘beer seller’ (*fūqqa’i kudaki*) and sells all he has in life to buy beer from him. He wants, in other words, to have reasons to be in close proximity to the young beer seller, to please him continuously, and to receive something from him. His love of the boy and his addiction to beer the boy is selling grow together. They eventually bring the wealthy man to utter destitution. In such a state, he continues to enjoy beer and the company of the beer seller: ‘Whenever he would receive some bread / he would give it all to buy some beer’.³⁵ Eventually, someone asks him about the meaning of love and the radically altered circumstances of his life. His response is:

Love is the thing that [could drive] you
to sell a hundred worlds worth of goods (*muta*) for just one single
[drink] of beer (*fūqqa*).
Not until a man has had such an experience
would he know anything about love or pain.³⁶

Stories such as this, which are not uncommon in the literature of the medieval period, reveal that beer selling and drinking constituted a mundane aspect of the social life of ordinary people (including the wealthy, the poor, and the underclass population). They also suggest that the consumption of alcohol was seen in certain quarters to be synonymous with detachment from the world and in fact a manifestation of mystical or, for that matter, earthly love.

Similarly, the popular literature of the pre-modern period, which gives a better sense of the life of average people, affirms that the consumption of alcohol was not limited to the upper classes. This is perhaps best shown by the epic romance known as *Samak-i ‘ayyar*, which dates to the twelfth century (or possibly earlier) and which is one of the most important sources we have for the reconstruction of the social history of Iran in the immediate centuries after Islam.³⁷ This lengthy prose narrative, which appears to have originated in the milieu of itinerant folk storytellers (who themselves generally came from the middling layers of society),

³⁵ Farid al-Din ‘Attar Nishaburi, *Mantiq al-tayr*, ed. Muhammad Javad Mashkur (Tehran: Kitabfurushi-yi Tehran, 1968), 224.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Marina Gaillard, ‘Samak-e ‘Ayyar’, *Encyclopedia Iranica*.

gives a detailed picture of ‘chivalrous’ brotherhoods and sisterhoods that constituted an important feature of the everyday life of the common people in many towns and cities of Iran in the pre-Islamic and medieval periods.³⁸ Members of these fraternities, who were known as ‘*ayyars*’, drew their new recruits often from the lower classes in society; they then initiated them in ceremonies that included ‘*shadi-khvari*’ (‘blissful drinking’ or ‘drinking to happiness’). In these and other frequent bouts and festivities, the duration of which sometimes extended for days, drinking alcohol was common among both male and female ‘*ayyars*. As one scholar has pointed out, ‘taking the oath with wine was *the* central ritual of the ‘*ayyars*, so much so that taking the oath with the “cup of the men” ... or its equivalent, oaths with the “cup of friendship” ..., was likewise central to the praxis of the ‘*ayyars*’.³⁹ The following excerpt—one of many depicting wine drinking throughout this extended narrative account—shows a typical oath ceremony where drinks function as the solidifier of the oath of brotherhood. In this scene, Niyal b. Sanjabi, a newly recruited ‘*ayyar*, takes an oath with Samak, the protagonist of the story, and his companion, Surkhvard:

Thus Niyal, Samak-i ‘*Ayyar*, and Surkhvard, the three of them, took an oath. They promised that by the Just God, by the Light and Fire, by the [wine] cup of the [chivalrous] men, and by the foundation of the pure and the good, to assist one another, to be friends with each other, not to turn away from one another until death, not to allow or engage in [any form of] lie, treachery, and deception, to be friends with each other’s friends, to be enemies of one another’s enemies, and to work towards each other’s wishes. When they took the oath, Samak-i ‘*Ayyar* asked [Niyal], ‘O my dear brother! How did you come to be friends with me?’ Niyal responded, ‘I have [now] drunk to your happiness because I had heard so much about your chivalry and ‘*ayyari*. I used to drink wine [on my own]. Now I [am happy to] have drunk to your happiness’. Samak then praised him [a great deal] When the night came, Niyal returned to that Treasure House [where Samak and Surkhvand resided], took Samak and Surkhvard to his own house, set them [at his table], and brought the food that he had prepared [throughout the day]. In this way, they ate [and celebrated] together. Then he brought wine. That night the three of them drank wine and confided in one another until the hour that the sun came out.⁴⁰

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Parvaneh Pourshariati, ‘The Ethics and Praxis of Mehr and Mithras and the Social Institution of the ‘*ayyars* in the Epic Romance of *Samak-e ‘ayyar*’, *Journal of Persianate Studies* 6 (2013): 33, emphasis in original.

⁴⁰ Faramarz b. Khudadad b. ‘Abd Allah al-Katib al-Arjani, *Samak ‘ayyar*, ed. Parviz Natil Khanlari (Tehran: Agah, 1983), vol. 2, 15–16.

Similar references to drinking bouts occur in another epic romance known as *Firuzshahnama*. The only extant version of this lengthy prose account is based on the narration of a certain Muhammad b. Ahmad Bighami, who is likely to have flourished sometime in the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries.⁴¹ The following selection provides a typical example of the scenes where wine functions as an indispensable part of the daily life of the characters in this story. In the case below, Akhi Sa'dan, a young 'ayyar who is also a cook by profession, entertains Firuz Shah, the protagonist, who finds himself one night in desperate need of taking refuge with Akhi Sa'dan:

'I am your servant', responded Akhi Sa'dan, and immediately brought whatever he had at his disposal, so that Firuz Shah would eat something, as he was extremely hungry and had little food for the previous three days. When the food was taken away, they assembled a drinking party (*majlis-i sharab*) and drank until sunrise. When the sun came out, Akhi Sa'dan went [straight] to open his shop.⁴²

As this excerpt and the one from *Samak-i 'ayyar* illustrate, popular heroes of the medieval Persian folk literature enjoyed regular, in fact excessive, drinking in their daily lives. To them, the act of consuming wine was a symbol of chivalry and brotherhood, even as it provided the opportunity for recreation and indulgence. These accounts, which are accurate reflections of the culture of the streets in the pre-modern period, reveal in no uncertain terms that the consumption of alcohol was not limited to the elites, but rather it was equally part of the everyday life of other social classes in medieval Iran.

The evidence provided so far seems to suggest that the amount of drinking along with the volume of alcohol production was quite a lot in pre-modern times. By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, the scale of output and consumption appears to have expanded even further.⁴³ Alcohol had now become a major industry in the Iranian lands. This was evident in the large quantity of wine that was produced

⁴¹ Muhammad b. Ahmad Bighami, *Darabnama*, ed. Zabih Allah Safa, 2 vols. (Tehran: Bangah-i Tarjumah va Nashr-i Kitab, 2002); and Muhammad b. Ahmad Bighami, *Firuzshahnama: Dumbala-yi Darabnama*, ed. Iraj Afshar and Mehran Afshari (Tehran: Chashma, 2009).

⁴² Bighami, *Firuzshahnama*, 119.

⁴³ For a fifteenth-century description of wine drinking in Timurid Iran, see the account of Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo, who visited Timur in Samarqand as the head of a Spanish mission in 1404; Browne, *A Literary History*, vol. 3, 200.

in the Safavid state every year. The southern city of Shiraz, for example, which was by no means the only centre of production, recorded an annual output of around 200,025 batmans (around 4,125 tons), which was a considerable amount by any global standard at the time.⁴⁴ A large quantity of this wine from Shiraz and elsewhere was consumed domestically, but a certain percentage was exported to other countries. By the early modern period, in other words, Persian wine had found a niche in the global market and had become a key export commodity for the Iranian state.⁴⁵ As the seventeenth-century French merchant traveller Jean-Baptiste Tavernier explained, ‘some 2,000 hl, approximately one-quarter of the total production from Shiraz in 1666, was for export to the Indies’, for instance.⁴⁶ The ever developing nature of the wine industry by the Safavid period can also be seen in the apparent change in the patterns of packaging, shipment, and quality control. People started, for example, to use bottles, as opposed to barrels, jars, or urns, for wine storage and transportation; we are told that bottles were ‘packed in cases so carefully that they only rarely broke’.⁴⁷ The new techniques that undergirded the production, storage, and transportation of wine were not in use for the export market alone. Domestically, too, wine had become an important consumer good. This development was perhaps most visible in the emergence of a distribution network in each city that included one or more *sharab khanas* (wine shops or taverns) where different types of alcoholic beverages, including wine, were openly sold and consumed. Moving beyond wine, we see that other alcoholic beverages were also available in the Safavid market. In most urban centres, there existed one or more *buza khanas* (beer houses) where *buza*—a type of intoxicating drink that was made from rice, millet, or barley—was enjoyed by people from different walks of life.⁴⁸ Distilled beverages had also become fashionable in these public venues. An early sixteenth-century historian described one particular type of spirit, which was known as arak (*‘araq*) and drew a good deal of popular interest. It was ‘a type of liquor that was transparent just like water; its main characteristic was its heat and fire;

⁴⁴ Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Voyages en Perse et description de ce royaume* (Paris: Édition du Carrefour, 1930), 304–305.

⁴⁵ Willem Floor, *The Economy of Safavid Persia* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2000), 166.

⁴⁶ Saeidi and Unwin, ‘Persian Wine’, 102.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ For a discussion of the origins of this term, see Berthold Laufer, ‘On the Possible Oriental Origin of Our Word Booze’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 49 (1929): 56–58.

and it looked like melted crystal'.⁴⁹ Depending on the availability of the raw material in a given locality, arak could be produced from grapes, raisins, apples, pears, or dates. Yet another popular beverage was called *tahu*, which was obtained from distilling wine. The point is that wine and beer, whose output and consumption likely increased with time, functioned in a wider drinking culture by the early modern period.⁵⁰ There were now a variety of wines and alcoholic beverages that people enjoyed in different parts of the country.⁵¹

By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Persian drinking culture had long been associated with the leisure and indulgence of the middling and upper layers of society. But lower classes and rougher elements in the urban areas were now partaking in it as well. It was not uncommon, for example, to see antinomian Sufis, street toughs, and those who frequented brothels (*bayt al-lutf*), game houses (*qumar khanas*), or music houses (*qawal khanas*) visit wine shops and beer houses. Street wrestlers, jesters, jugglers, and magicians; people who attended the parties of pederasts, musicians, and male prostitutes; or those who organized and bet in street games—contemporary sources identify a few of these popular games as chess, backgammon, wolf fights, bullfights, ram fights, cockfights, and pigeon racing—were other regular attendees of these venues. Some of the people who visited wine shops and beer houses also took part in street fights and disorderly drinking parties in public. It was this aspect of the drinking culture, connected as it seems to have been with the low culture of the streets, sexual indecency, and public disturbance, that made it most objectionable to the authorities; it also incensed the orthodox clerics, who had some religious and legal reasons for their opposition. Instances of intermittent bans on drinking and wine production thus abounded in late medieval and early modern times. One gets the impression, however, that, beyond religious orthodoxy—which has been extensively written about—there was an element of concern with regard to the expansion of alcohol consumption in society and its

⁴⁹ Ghiyas al-Din Khvandamir, *Tarikh-i Habib al-siyar fi akhbar-i afrad-i bashar*, ed. Jalal Huma'i and Muhammad Dabir-Siyaqi, vol. 3 (Tehran: Khayyam, 1954), 533.

⁵⁰ See Matthee, *The Pursuit*, 37–96, where different aspects of the culture of wine drinking, along with the intermittent legal and religious bans on the consumption of alcohol, in the Safavid period are discussed.

⁵¹ As one scholar has recently noted, 'the Iranian consumer [in the medieval period and by implication even later] had a large menu of [various] types of wine to choose from, leaving aside other alcoholic beverages such as beer, hydromel or mead, arak, and *buz'a*', which were also widely available; Floor, 'The Culture of Wine Drinking', 171.

growing connection with sexual misconduct and social disorder that was behind the occasional implementation of these bans.⁵² Such association of wine with ‘crime’ may have been limited to specific venues (for example, wine shops, beer houses, and certain neighbourhoods), social groups (that is, the working and rougher classes in the urban areas), and circumstances of consuming alcohol in public (for example, pederasty and alcoholic consumption were evidently not unrelated).⁵³ More ‘refined’ manners of drinking among the middling and upper classes continued to present probably a more respectable cultural strand that could have redefined and rehabilitated the image of wine consumption in society.

Occasional interdictions of drinking and wine production notwithstanding, the consumption of alcohol was integrated fully into a much broader imperial economy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. We know this because we have records of the Safavid state levying taxes on the owners of wine shops and beer houses.⁵⁴ That the state was interested in regulating the alcohol industry (not just at the point of production⁵⁵ but more importantly at the sale and distribution levels) suggests that consumption of this substance was formally recognized as legitimate in society, and that it had become an integral part of the revenue structure and the economy of the state in the early modern period.

To suppress distress and generate euphoria

Alcohol was by no means the only recreational drug consumed in the Iranian world in the medieval and early modern periods. People were

⁵² On the connection between religious orthodoxy and intermittent bans on alcohol consumption in Iran, see notes 50 and 53.

⁵³ See the contents of several bans described in Rasul Ja‘fariyan, *Safaviyya dar ‘arsa-yi din, farhang va siyasat*, vol. 1 (Qum: Pazhuhishkada-yi Hawza va Danishgah, 2000), 371–409; the association of drinking with petty crimes is also noted in a number of contemporary sources analysed by Ja‘fariyan. See also Muhammad Ibrahim b. Zayn al-‘Abidin Nasiri, *Dastur-i shahryaran*, ed. Muhammad Nadir Nasiri Muqaddam (Tehran: Bunyad-i Muqafat-i Duktur Mahmud Afshar, 1994), 50–52; and Muhammad Ibrahim Sarmadi, ‘Tanbih al-ghafilin’, folio 52, MS No. F4575/1 in the National Library of Iran.

⁵⁴ Mehdi Keyvani, ‘Artisans and Guild Life in the Later Safavid Period’ (PhD diss., Durham University, 1980), 63.

⁵⁵ The output of the raw material for alcohol (that is, grain, grapes, and other fruits), like that of other agricultural products, was taxed quite regularly in the countryside; I. P. Petrushevsky, *Kishavarzi va munasibat-i arzi dar Iran-i ‘ahd-i Mughul (qarnha-yi 13 va 14 Miladi)*, trans. Karim Kishavarz, vol. 2 (Tehran: Mu‘assasa-yi Mutali‘at va Tahqiqat-i Ijtima‘i, 1965), 191–305.

also intimately familiar with opiates, whose presence in the region went back centuries. We know, for example, that, as early as 3400 BCE, the opium poppy was cultivated in lower Mesopotamia and its psychoactive properties were known in various population centres across West and South Asia. Sumerians, Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, as well as Greeks and Indians had sophisticated understanding of the physiological effects of opium on the body and the mind, and used this substance for a variety of medicinal, anaesthetic, mystical, and occult purposes.⁵⁶ This wider regional acquaintance with the poppy was in all likelihood shared among the Persians as well, who were at one point in control of Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Levant, and parts of Greece and India. There was also a good deal of commercial exchange between different population centres of West and South Asia in antiquity which facilitated the transfer of a highly portable drug like opium. We know, for instance, that, by the second century BCE, opium was imported along with spices, slaves, perfumes, and precious stones from India into Parthian Iran.⁵⁷ Whatever the scale of opium production and exchange before Islam, it is likely that, with the establishment of the earliest caliphate in the seventh century and in the context of the heightened circulation of people, commodities, and ideas across the broader Middle East during this time, the production, trade, and consumption of this substance expanded even further.⁵⁸

By the tenth century, the poppy was probably cultivated in different parts of the Iranian lands. This point may be gleaned from several references to opium in one of the earliest and most detailed lists of cultivars in Persian that dates back to the second half of the tenth century. The author, a certain Abu Mansur al-Haravi, who was both a physician and a pharmacologist, spoke of two different types of the opium plant—namely ‘white’ and ‘black’ ones—and compared the psychoactive properties of their extracts with ‘Mandragora’ (*yabruj*), ‘wild lettuce’ (*kahu-yi kuhi*), and ‘cannabis’ or a cannabis-like substance (*bang*). He explained that opiates in general and opium more specifically have ‘a lot of benefits’ for all sorts of illnesses, and then enumerated a number of different methods his contemporaries employed in order to

⁵⁶ Martin Booth, *Opium: A History* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 15–16; and Sadiqi, ‘Taryak’.

⁵⁷ Brunner, ‘Geographical and Administrative Divisions’, 739.

⁵⁸ On this point, see, for example, Andrew M. Watson, *Agricultural Innovation in the Early Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), which examines the diffusion of a number of crops across the Middle East in the first centuries after the Arab conquests.

consume opium. One particular manner of consumption was to add opium, cinnamon, and pepper to ‘very old wine’, and take it the way most people consumed their wine. Such references and the sheer number of ways opium had come to be used seem to indicate that the substance had been integrated, for some time, into a culture that saw its medicinal and recreational functions as interconnected.⁵⁹ It is perhaps against this background that we should understand the often indignant references to the seemingly ‘inappropriate’ consumption of opium that we find in some contemporary didactic works. One such remark occurs in the Zoroastrian Middle Persian text *Arda Viraznamag*, which condemns the evidently not-so-uncommon recreational use of opium in society. A religious and doctrinal text at its core, the *Arda Viraznamag*, like many Zoroastrian works, underwent successive redactions. The book is thought to have reached its final form in the ninth or tenth century.⁶⁰ In this detailed narrative of an extra-terrestrial journey to Heaven and Hell, Arda Viraz, the principal character of the account, encounters a woman who is punished quite severely for what appears to be her inappropriate use and distribution of opium:

Then I saw the soul of a woman whose breasts they cut off; and her belly was torn, and the entrails given to the dogs. And I asked thus: ‘What sin was committed by this woman?’ Srosh the pious, and Ataro the angel, said thus: ‘This is the soul of that wicked woman, by whom, in the world, poison and oil [perhaps “liquor” or “infusion”] of opium were made and kept, and given by her to people to eat’.⁶¹

It seems unlikely that the woman in the above excerpt was thought to be liable for such a harsh sentence because she had promoted opium for some medical purpose alone. Contemporary references such as this suggest, in other words, that, by the tenth century, or possibly earlier, opium was no longer consumed for its healing properties only. Some had come to use it in ways that the more conservative elements in society considered harmful and abusive.

The number of such remarks in the original sources increased exponentially in the eleventh century. This may have been because of the

⁵⁹ Abu Mansur Muvaffaq b. ‘Ali al-Haravi, *al-Abniyya ‘an haqayiq al-adviiyya* (Tehran: Miras-i Maktub, 2009), 39, 129–130. See also Petrushevsky, *Kishavarzi*, vol. 1, 301–303.

⁶⁰ Ph. Gignoux, ‘Arda Wiraz’, *Encyclopedia Iranica*.

⁶¹ Destur Hoshangji Jamaspji, Martin Haug, and E. W. West, eds., *The Book of Arda Viraf* (Bombay: Government Central Book Depot, 1872), 196. See also Neligan, *The Opium Question*, 7–8.

heightened visibility of the drug in society compared with the previous centuries. The literate classes who composed most of the contemporary accounts appear to have been exposed more than ever before to a rising culture of opium consumption in this period.⁶² A close reading of these references, in any case, seems to indicate that the substance had long come to be used for both medicinal and recreational purposes. When, for example, towards the end of his life, Avicenna ('Abu 'Ali Sina) (980–1037), the great philosopher and physician of medieval Iran, was plagued by several different illnesses, we are told that one of his attendants added opium to the 'Mithridate Concoction' (*mā'jun-i Mitruditus*) that he drank regularly in order to contain his 'epilepsy'.⁶³ Such medical use of the drug was as fashionable as consuming it for its intoxicating properties. The latter is often suggested when contemporary sources compare the place of opium in society with that of wine. To cite one such case, we may refer to the work of the philosopher-poet Abu Mu'in Nasir-i Khusraw (1004–88) wherein opium appears frequently as a much stronger recreational substance. One representative line, for instance, comes from an ode about the human body and soul. In this searching meditation on the meaning of life, the narrator berates the body for having ambitions for an eternal life and blames his interlocutor for being intoxicated not with wine, but with opium: 'Someone intoxicated with wine would not be like this because / it is clear that you are in this state and befuddled in this specific way by reason of opium'.⁶⁴ Such mention of opium consumption, symbolic and metaphorical though it may be, abounds in the poetry of Nasir-i Khusraw and his contemporaries. These literary references indicate that, in the context of the drug culture of the eleventh century, the audience of this poetry understood quite well the comparison that was drawn with alcohol.⁶⁵

Moving beyond the poetry of the eleventh century, we may refer to *Tarikh-i Bayhaqi*, which is a remarkably detailed chronicle of the reign of

⁶² Neligan, *The Opium Question*, 8. References to opium under various terms such as 'khashkhashi', 'afyun', 'hapyun', 'kuknar', 'taryak', and the like are very numerous in the writings of the literati (especially the poets) in the eleventh century and throughout the rest of the medieval period.

⁶³ Khvandamir, *Tarikh*, vol. 2, 447.

⁶⁴ Nasir b. Khusraw al-Qubadiyani, *Divan-i Nasir-i Khusraw* (Tehran: Nigah va 'Ilm, 1994), 534.

⁶⁵ It is important to note that other key references in the poetry of Nasir-i Khusraw show more clearly that he was at the end very critical of the addictive or recreational use of opium which he considered quite harmful; Muhammad Ja'far Mahjub, 'Taryak', *Yaghma* 20.2 (1967): 69–70.

Sultan Mas'ud of Ghazna (r. 1030–41) and which affords a rare window on the culture and society of Iran in this period. A casual mention of opium use in this historical account reveals that the consumption of this substance for the purpose of stiffening courage and lessening anxiety may not have been infrequent in medieval battlefields and military conflicts. The reference in question comes from a description of the most important of the Ghaznavid expeditions against the invading forces of the Saljuq Turks in 1039, during which the author, a secretary in the Ghaznavid court, witnessed the king take some opium:

One marvelous event that [may have] indicated that [the Saljuq leader] Tughril should not have been captured [during this expedition] was the following. [On the way to intercept Tughril who was at this time based in the city of Tus], the sultan had a little opium and as a result had not been able to sleep well [during the day?]. After the evening prayer, however, he slept while riding his elephant. Knowing this, the [royal] guards did not dare to run the elephant faster [at night. This was evidently a customary practice in times of war.] Instead, they directed the animal very slowly [throughout the night]. In this way, the sultan slept until near dawn, and thus a unique opportunity [to intercept Tughril] was missed. Because had that [untimely] sleep not happened, we would have reached and would have captured Tughril by the morning.⁶⁶

Read in the context of similar statements in other contemporary sources, the passage suggests that opium consumption was probably not uncommon in the Ghaznavid court, and among the rank and file of the Ghaznavid soldiers and subjects. The excerpt indicates as well that people such as the author of *Tarikh-i Bayhaqi* were likely familiar with the non-medicinal use of the drug. That opium was known and consumed in the Ghaznavid court and beyond is attested likewise in the poetry of Abu al-Hasan Farrukhi Sistani (980–1037), a prominent poet and panegyrist at the Ghaznavid court. In one ode praising a high-ranking personage—identified as 'Azid al-Dawla Amir Yusuf b. Nasir al-Din—Farrukhi implied that opium consumption was an ordinary thing in court and among soldiers: 'The opponents arrive to face the prince in the battleground / feeble like the intoxicated ones who had [a good deal of] opium'.⁶⁷

Whatever the level of opium production and use in the eleventh century, the cultivation of the poppy and its trade and consumption expanded

⁶⁶ Abu al-Fazl Bayhaqi, *Tarikh-i Bayhaqi*, ed. Khalil Khatib-Rahbar, vol. 3 (Tehran: Mahtab, 2002), 935.

⁶⁷ Abu al-Hasan Farrukhi, *Divan-i Hakim Farrukhi Sistani*, ed. Muhammad Dabir-Siyaqi (Tehran: Zavvar, 1984), 289.

further in the later periods. This was the case particularly after the Mongol conquests in the thirteenth century.⁶⁸ In the reign of Mahmud Ghazan Khan (1295–1304), for example, we know that a ‘special and “salutary”’ theriaca became popular in the Ilkhanid state that was known as *taryaq-i Ghazani*. By 1332, moreover, there had been enough opium produced in Iran that the Ilkhanid ruler, Abu Sa‘id Bahadur Khan (r. 1316–35), was able to send ‘an envoy [to Yuan China] with a tribute of 88 catties [Chinese pounds] of theriaca [ta-li-ya],⁶⁹ designated specifically for the great khan in Beijing. This seems to be the first recorded case of sending Persian opium across long distances. By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, furthermore, various groups of people who were avid consumers of alcohol in the Iranian lands had come to consider opium as a key instrument of indulgence and leisure.

The affinity that many saw between opium and alcohol was perhaps most clearly manifested in the particular ways people consumed the two. It was common, for instance, to have opium and wine together. This is illustrated in numerous instances in the Persian poetry from the medieval period. We shall refer to one representative example that comes from a lyric composed by Sa‘di. The poem is about the pretensions of overtly pious believers and the virtuous life of a tolerant but worldly mystic. In one specific line, the author depicts a festive atmosphere where the persona in the poem brings together a youthful beloved, a spiritual wayfarer, and an enlightened individual to celebrate their fellowship and mystical union. He notes: ‘We have brought the learned sage in a state of happiness and the Sufi whirling. / We have made the lover dance and have put opium in the wine cup’.⁷⁰ Regardless of its broader meaning and implications, the line shows that people consumed opium along with wine and that the former was a key instrument of entertainment in such convivial settings. This point is implied likewise in a well-known lyric about love, self, and the path to a fulfilling life written by the fourteenth-century poet, Shams al-Din Muhammad Shirazi, better known as Hafiz (1325–89). In the following line, ‘the cup-bearer’ is in

⁶⁸ Petrushevsky, *Kishavarzi*, vol. 1, 303, 332–333; I. P. Petrushevsky, ‘The Socio-economic Condition of Iran under the Il-Khans’, in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 5, *The Saljuq and Mongol Periods*, ed. J. A. Boyle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 502; and Thomas T. Allsen, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 155.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Sa‘di, *Kulliyat*, 807.

effect the embodiment of the ideal beloved while ‘the opponents’ are rivals of the poem’s narrator in a quest for the attention and the affection of the beloved: ‘Of that opium that the cup-bearer cast in the wine, / the opponents have all but lost their heads and turbans’.⁷¹ The metaphorical use of wine and opium in this line notwithstanding, the image that Hafiz conjures up is unmistakably drawn from the social atmosphere of the late medieval period.

The affinity that people saw between the two drugs could be seen in other manners of opium consumption as well. Many, for example, mixed opium juice with hempseeds and created a syrup called Faluniya, which appeared similar to an alcoholic beverage.⁷² Another popular drink was made out of bruised opium capsules that had been ‘cooked’ in water and spices; the product looked and tasted like mulled wine. Opium juice was likewise mixed with honey, bezoar, zedoary, black pepper, saffron, Spanish chamomile, and still other spices. The result was a tonic that resembled wine and was called *barsh*.⁷³ Such evident parallels between opium and alcohol had in effect turned the former to an accessory of the latter and its quasi-legal and less problematic equivalent. Since opiates, unlike wine and alcohol, were not explicitly mentioned in the canonical texts of Islam, it was possible for many consumers to contend that opium should not be the target of religious or legal censure. The affinity with alcohol thus allowed opium to find a suitable niche in society. Its ambiguous legal status, on the other hand, made any interdiction quite difficult, if not impossible. But this was not the only advantage opium had over wine and other alcoholic beverages. People also turned processed opium extracts to pills, paste, or powder, which they carried with themselves throughout the day. Opium was, in other words, a more portable drug that could be consumed with ease and speed just about anywhere. This was clearly not the case with more conventional drinks.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Shams al-Din Muhammad Hafiz Shirazi, *Divan-i Hafiz-i Qudsi*, ed. Muhammad Qudsi (Tehran: Chashma, 2002), 288; see also another line in Shirazi, *Divan*, 280; and Neligan, *The Opium Question*, 8–9.

⁷² Faluniya was evidently named after Philon of Tarsus, a well-known Roman physician; Iskandar Bayg Munshi, *Tarikh-i ‘alamara-yi ‘Abbasi*, vol. 1 (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1955), 218.

⁷³ ‘Imad al-Din Shirazi, *Risala-yi afyuniyya* (Tehran: Mu’assasa-yi Mutali‘at-i Tarikh-i Pizishki, 2005), 99; Muhammad ‘Ali Qazvini, extract from ‘Adab al-‘aliyya’ published as ‘Dar mazirrat-i dukhaniyyat va qahva va afyun’, *Sukhan* 17.4 (1967): 373; and Mathee, *The Pursuit*, 102.

⁷⁴ Mathee, *The Pursuit*, 99; Neligan, *The Opium Question*, 8–9; and Shirazi, *Risala-yi afyuniyya*, 108–130.

Such qualities that opium possessed helped make it a sought-after consumer good. By the early sixteenth century, one gets the impression that the popular interest in the drug in certain parts of Iran had surpassed that in alcohol. There were now regions and communities whose collective opium consumption was so high that they had acquired a reputation for grappling with addiction. No such development had previously been recorded with respect to alcohol. Tabriz, for example, was known now to have a population that was by and large accustomed to opium. We are told that ‘most of the people’ in the city consumed the substance and, as one historical geographer noted sardonically, they appeared to have two radically different personalities as a result: ‘If one [tries to] speak with them in the morning, they [are without patience and] respond with irritation. But when they receive their [regular] portion of hilarity (*kayfiyyat*) in the afternoon, if they hear a hundred terrible things from someone, they respond softly and with humility’.⁷⁵

Such societies of opium consumers only expanded in the later decades of the sixteenth and throughout the seventeenth centuries. Now ‘a lot of people’ associated with the ‘seminaries’, the ‘Sufi establishments’, and the literary circles, as well as those who engaged in hard labour consumed the substance. Opium was also popular among the soldiers, the workers, the poor, and the elites.⁷⁶ In major urban centres of the Safavid state, noted quite disapprovingly a certain Muhammad ‘Ali Qazvini in the seventeenth century, ‘there is no one who is not polluted to some type of opiates’.⁷⁷ For their part, though, people had a variety of reasons for turning to opium. Some used it to keep themselves awake while travelling, others to make themselves warm during winter. Some sought to increase their sexual drive, others to commit suicide. Some wanted to generate inner strength in themselves; others pursued a mind-altering experience that they thought helped them find inspiration for new ideas and discoveries, be they mystical or otherwise. There were also reports that some wished to generate personal happiness and euphoria, others to suppress their distress. As the Safavid physician, ‘Imad al-Din Mahmud Shirazi (fl. sixteenth century), explained in a treatise on opium, ‘some people are addicted to opium because of this latter

⁷⁵ Khvandamir, *Tarikh*, vol. 4, 653.

⁷⁶ Mathee, *The Pursuit*, 101–108.

⁷⁷ Qazvini, ‘Dar mazirrat’, 373.

reason alone. They have a lot of pain and misery as a result of the [recent economic?] changes in life. They have recourse to opium in order to suppress their distress'.⁷⁸

To sustain this growing popular demand in Safavid Iran, opium trade and output had likewise increased in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But 'the popular interest in opium' was at times so 'extreme and high' that it could not be addressed by the annual production in the country. In such cases, it was not uncommon to see opium sellers engage in price-gouging or adulterating their commodity.⁷⁹ Still in a clear sign of an expanding opium industry, a nascent distribution network carried the substance from the countryside where it was produced to various towns and cities of the empire where the market was most lucrative. A group of specialized retailers (*taryak furushan*) had also emerged in the urban areas who were involved in the daily sale of opium; they would eventually organize their own autonomous guilds in major towns and cities of the country.⁸⁰ By the sixteenth century, moreover, most urban centres had one or more *kuknar khanas* (opium dens) and *mājun khanas* (concoction houses) where customers enjoyed, among other things, drinks made out of opium extracts.⁸¹ Like wine shops and beer houses, these establishments were subject to regular government taxation.⁸² The production and sale of opium and its derivatives were, in other words, part of the formal economy of the Safavid state just as their consumption was an aspect of the everyday culture and economy of many households. Beyond the rising internal consumption, there may have been a foreign market for this burgeoning opium industry as well. Portable and highly valuable, the substance could have been exported to the regions neighbouring the Safavid state.⁸³ The amount of export (if any) must have remained negligible, however. It was only in the nineteenth century that opium

⁷⁸ Shirazi, *Risala-yi afyunīyya*, 52–55; Falsafi, 'Shah 'Abbas', 443–447; and Mahjub, 'Taryak', 72.

⁷⁹ Shirazi, *Risala-yi afyunīyya*, 35.

⁸⁰ Mirza Tahir Vahid, 'Divan-i Rizvan', MS. No. 4344 in the Central Library of the University of Tehran, quoted in Keyvani, 'Artisans and Guild Life', 323.

⁸¹ The ingredients of a number of *mājun* drinks are explained in Nur Allah Tabbakh and Jamal al-Din Yahya b. Husayn, *Du risala dar tabbakhī va halvapazi*, ed. Mahdi Ravanji (Qum: Ibtikar-i Danish, 2012), 116, 165–182.

⁸² Matthee, *The Pursuit*, 107–8; and Keyvani, 'Artisans and Guild Life', 63.

⁸³ R. W. Ferrier, 'An English View of Persian Trade in 1618: Reports from the Merchants Edward Pettus and Thomas Barker', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 19.2 (May 1976): 202, 208.

export (mostly to China) became significant enough to warrant mention in the contemporary sources.⁸⁴

It was perhaps because of this growing economy and culture of opium use in the Iranian lands that there was intermittent opposition to the drug in the medieval and early modern periods. Some political elites and orthodox religious groups were concerned about the increasing popular interest in the substance and objected to the sale of opium derivatives in public. To a large extent, this opposition mirrored the one against alcohol; it appears to have been activated, at least in part, by the not-so-infrequent instances of sexual misconduct and social disorder that accompanied the public consumption of opium by the lower and rougher elements in society.⁸⁵ Others had purely religious and legal grounds for their hostility towards the drug; this was because they considered opium a psychoactive substance quite similar to alcohol. These orthodox religious classes, in other words, objected to the use of all intoxicants in society. Ultimately, though, as one scholar has noted recently, being ‘not explicitly excoriated in the Koran, [opium] was so thoroughly indigenized [in Iranian society over the course of the medieval and early modern periods] that it barely provoked [continuous] religious ... resistance’.⁸⁶

Cooking *bang* in a mosque and other stories

Alcohol and opium were by no means the only recreational substances popular in the Iranian world in the medieval and early modern periods. People were also familiar with at least one other drug, that is, cannabis or a cannabis-like substance, whose consumption had a long history that went back to antiquity. The effort to document the story of this product is, however, frustrated by a glaring confusion that exists in many original sources from the ancient, medieval, and early modern periods. While some careful scientific treatises, such as al-Haravi’s tenth-century pharmacological work,⁸⁷ differentiate clearly between cannabis (*shahdana*) and a cannabis-like substance (*bang*), many other historical sources use the term ‘*bang*’ (also ‘*bany*’ and ‘*mang*’) along with a variety of other names (such as *shahdana* and *gargariny*) quite indiscriminately. It seems that they deploy these terms in order to refer to one or two products

⁸⁴ Shahnavaaz, ‘Afyun’.

⁸⁵ Ja’fariyan, *Safaviyya*, vol. 1, 375, 376.

⁸⁶ Matthee, *The Pursuit*, 113.

⁸⁷ Al-Haravi, *al-Abniyya*, 65, 200.

that were quite popular in the Iranian lands. The problem is compounded further by the fact that different varieties of cannabis and the cannabis-like plant (perhaps henbane?) were present in society throughout the ancient, medieval, and early modern periods, and they all had different properties and usage. This unfortunate development—that is, the confusion over the precise meaning of terms such as *bang*—is not limited to the historical sources in Persian. The medieval Arabic literature has a similar problem with the uncritical but widespread use of the term *banj*.⁸⁸ The challenge that the indiscriminate deploying of the above-noted terms (especially *bang*) presents thus makes it very difficult, perhaps impossible even, to chronicle the evolving consumption patterns of each of the plants and the substances taken from them separately. In our discussion below, we shall therefore specify whatever term our sources use—which is *bang* more often than not—in an effort to document the history of cannabis and/or a cannabis-like substance.⁸⁹

With this caveat in mind, we may begin by stating that Iranians were familiar with cannabis in the ancient and pre-Islamic period. Herodotus, for example, mentioned that hemp was known to Scythians, who were a nomadic people of Iranian origin based in the steppe lands to the north of the Black Sea region during the seventh to the fourth centuries BCE. They evidently consumed hemp for recreational and industrial purposes. ‘There is a plant growing in their country called cannabis’, the Greek historian explained, ‘which closely resembles flax, except that cannabis is thicker-stemmed and taller. In Scythia, in fact, it is far taller. It grows wild, but is also cultivated, and the Thracians use it, as well as flax, for making clothes’.⁹⁰ The industrial use of hemp was indeed common among ancient Iranians. Recent archaeological evidence suggests that, as early as the beginning of the first millennium

⁸⁸ Rosenthal, *The Herb*, 19–20.

⁸⁹ A close reading of the available sources seems to afford a bewildering range of attitudes towards *bang* in the medieval and early modern periods. The diversity of opinions, in other words, defy an easy summary. However, we may still identify two important categories of sentiment that were sometimes collapsed into one another as well. On the one hand, some sources considered *bang* an extremely dangerous drug that had some medicinal and hallucinogenic properties but could drive careless and uninitiated users to madness or death. Other sources, on the other hand, assumed that *bang* had medicinal and hallucinogenic qualities similar to opium but did not discuss, acknowledge, or stress its dangerous and lethal properties.

⁹⁰ Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 259. Herodotus noted as well that Scythians consumed the smoke of cannabis seeds for pleasure.

BCE, hemp was used to make fabrics, strings, or ropes in the culture that flourished on the southwest of the Caspian coast. Similarly, hemp cord, along with other textile remains, has been found on the Iranian plateau dating back to the Parthian period.⁹¹ In addition, several key Middle Persian texts that have pre-Islamic origins refer to *bang* (or ‘*mang*’) as a medicinal or an empowering drug. One explicitly notes that, when Ahriman, which is God’s principal adversary in the Zoroastrian religion, attacked the creation, ‘Ohrmazd [that is, the creator God] gave the primordial bull a “medicinal” *mang* to lessen its injury’. The substance was also ‘an ingredient of the “illuminating drink” that allowed Wištāsp [an early believer and patron of the Prophet Zoroaster] to see the “great *xwarrah*” and the “great mystery” of the Zoroastrian faith. As one scholar has pointed out, *bang* was in fact ‘an integral part of the ecstatic practice aimed at opening the “eye of the soul”,⁹² in the pre-Islamic religion of Iran. This point is perhaps most evident in the narrative account of the *Arda Viraznamag* where the principal character undertakes a spiritual journey to Heaven and Hell induced in part by drinking, according to customs, three cups of wine mixed with *mang*. The story gives the impression that the manner of consuming this substance was quite well established in the culture of Iran during this time:

And then Viraf [also Arda Viraz who is the principal character of the account] joined his hands on his breast before the Mazdayasnians, and said to them thus: ‘It is the custom that I should pray to the departed souls, and eat food, and make a will; afterwards, you will give me the wine and narcotic’. The desturs [that is, the Zoroastrian spiritual authorities] directed thus: ‘Act accordingly’.

When Arda Viraz is done performing the rituals and is ready for his mystical journey,

those desturs of the religion filled three golden cups with wine and the narcotic (*mang*) of Vishtasp; and they gave one cup over to Viraf with the word ‘well-thought’, and the second cup with the word ‘well-said’, and the third cup with the word ‘well-done’; and he swallowed the wine and narcotic, and said grace whilst conscious, and [then] slept upon the carpet.⁹³

The culture of *bang* consumption was, in other words, developed to some extent in the pre-Islamic period. Still, with the passage of time, the use and exchange of this substance expanded further. By the ninth century,

⁹¹ Karen S. Rubinson, ‘Carpets, VI. Pre-Islamic Carpets’, *Encyclopedia Iranica*.

⁹² Gnoli, ‘Bang’.

⁹³ Jamaspji, Haug, and West, *The Book of Arda Viraf*, 150–151.

for example, the drug had become so popular that some orthodox scholars of Islam who resided in the eastern 'Abbasid caliphate began to worry about its effects on believers and in society at large.⁹⁴ It is from this point onwards that historical sources start to mention *bang* on a more consistent basis. Despite the emergence of some clerical opposition, the fortunes of the drug were on the rise in the Iranian lands. By the eleventh century, the substance had become an important instrument of indulgence and entertainment among the elites and commoners alike. This was perhaps most evident in the variety of ways people had come to enjoy the drug. Just as was the case with opium, having *bang* along with wine and other alcoholic beverages was now quite fashionable. This manner of consumption was a recurring trope in the Persian literature of the period.⁹⁵ One representative verse in the poetry of Farrukhi Sistani reveals how this common method of use was referenced in the literary works of the eleventh century: 'Before you, the most eloquent speakers remain speechless / just like someone who has taken *bang* with a cup of wine'. This line comes in the middle of an ode in praise of a high-ranking personage—a certain Amir Abu Ya'qub Yusuf b. Nasir al-Din. It shows that the literati and the political elites of the Ghaznavid state, who constituted the primary audiences of poems such as this, were not unfamiliar with the meaning of the reference to *bang*. In fact, it is likely that they enjoyed the drug in their own frequent drinking bouts. A different way of taking the substance in this period was to ingest it on its own. This point is suggested in the contemporary sources by the recurrent statement of 'eating *bang*', which is then followed with no specific mention of other drugs that could have accompanied it.⁹⁶ Yet another form of consumption entailed cooking hemp leaves and mixing them with husked sesame and a sweetener

⁹⁴ Rosenthal, *The Herb*, 49.

⁹⁵ Mahmoud Omidisalar, 'Dug-e Wahdat', *Encyclopedia Iranica*; and Browne, *A Literary History*, vol. 2, 205. See also numerous references to '*bang*', '*mang*', '*charas*', '*kanb*', '*qanb*', '*shahdana*', '*shahdanaq*', '*shahdanaq*', and the like in the poetry and prose of such luminaries as Abu al-Hasan Farrukhi Sistani, Abu Mu'in Nasir-i Khusraw, Jalal al-Din Rumi, Muslih al-Din Sa'di Shirazi, Rukn al-Din Awhadi, and Shams al-Din Muhammad Hafiz Shirazi.

⁹⁶ An ode written by Nasir-i Khusraw about the meaning of the world and the importance of leading a virtuous life provides a typical example. In this piece, the narrator gives advice to an inexperienced interlocutor and at one point states: 'Do not go after those who are inebriated, / if you do not eat *bang* just like them'. Numerous other references such as this reveal that *bang* was probably sometimes taken on its own. See also Nasir b. Khusraw, *Divan*, 287; and Farrukhi, *Divan*, 212.

such as sugar, honey, and date syrup. The product was made into a paste and eventually pills that could be taken at will. This method of use turned *bang*, just like opium, to one of the most portable and convenient recreational substances available in the Iranian lands.⁹⁷ Such diverse manners of consumption and having it along with wine or in the style of opium indicate that, by the eleventh century, the recreational use of this substance was prevalent among several different groups of people. The growing public interest in *bang* resulted in the rise of several common ‘nicknames’ for the drug in this period as well. One popular term was ‘hashish’, which meant ‘the herb’. The nickname appears to suggest that the substance had become well known and quite fashionable in society, so much so that it now had a recognizable colloquial name.⁹⁸

Whatever the level of consumption up to this point, historical evidence suggests that *bang* became even more popular in the Iranian world between the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries. We know, for example, that, during this time, antinomian Sufis were able to integrate hashish into their rituals and practices, and then export the substance to different parts of the Islamic ecumene. In their wanderings to regions neighbouring Iran, they introduced the drug, more specifically, to the like-minded communities in Iraq and the other centres of trade and pilgrimage in the west.⁹⁹ Inside the Iranian lands, on the other hand, the consumption of *bang* had expanded by the Mongol invasions in the thirteenth century.¹⁰⁰ Historical sources from this period often attribute the expansion of drug use to the cultural impact of the Mongol onslaughts.¹⁰¹ The connections that people drew between the spread of *bang* and the advent of the new social and political order may have been grounded in the purported Mongol susceptibility to abuse drugs and stimulants, the overall negative image the Mongols had in Iran and the broader Middle East, and the historical tendency to blame them for

⁹⁷ Rosenthal, *The Herb*, 57–71.

⁹⁸ The currency of this nickname may have been in part because of the association of the substance with the Nizari Isma‘ilis—a secretive and subversive Shiite religious group that condoned the consumption of *bang*—in this period. Still, the popularity and usage of a new term that meant ‘the herb’ seem to imply much wider familiarity with the drug in the eleventh century; *ibid.*, 21–22, 42–43.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 49–55.

¹⁰⁰ This may be seen in the many references to *bang* in the contemporary literature; see especially the poetry of Awhad al-Din Kirmani, *Divan-i ruba‘iyat-i Awhad al-Din Kirmani*, ed. Ahmad Abu Mahjub (Tehran: Surush, 1987), 272–273, 311.

¹⁰¹ Rosenthal, *The Herb*, 55.

what many sources considered a pernicious development in the region. But it could be possible as well that the nascent globalization that the Mongol empire facilitated across Eurasia brought about a heightened circulation of not just people, ideas, and more conventional consumer goods, but also drugs such as *bang* in and around the Iranian world. By the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, in any case, the consumption patterns of *bang* were changing as well. We hear for the first time that people started to prepare the drug by mixing it with dairy products. It was now common to ‘cook’ *bang* leaves in milk and add some sweeteners to the tonic before taking it. Some Sufis also promoted a beverage that was made from diluted yogurt and hashish extracts. The product was a concoction that they called the ‘drink of [divine] unity’ (*dugh-i vahdat*).¹⁰²

Much to the consternation of the orthodox religious groups, by the fourteenth century, sellers of *bang* and *charas* (the latter being the powder form of hemp leaves)¹⁰³ had made their appearance in many towns and cities across the Iranian lands. People had also started to take the substance more openly. The audacity of the retailers and consumers is depicted often evocatively in the literature of this period. A case in point is the profane and irreverent writing of ‘Ubayd Zakani. In one anecdote from his *Risala-yi dilgusha*, we find a nameless, ‘average’ person preparing *bang* in a mosque. He is presumably intent on enjoying the substance himself or alternatively giving it to other worshippers:

A person from Shiraz was cooking *bang* in a mosque. The custodian of the mosque saw this and began to quarrel with him. The Shirazi looked carefully at him and saw that he was extremely ugly. He was [also] lame, deaf, bald, and blind. The Shirazi responded by saying, ‘You inferior man! Is it because God has not been very kind to you that you are driven to be so overtly prejudiced about his house?’¹⁰⁴

The comic and exaggerated tenor of the story notwithstanding, it implies that the response on the part of the conservative elements was often open hostility. Other historical sources from the fourteenth century tell us more about the nature of this growing opposition. For example, when a conservative dervish by the name of Shams al-Din ‘Ali (r. 1347–51)

¹⁰² Omidshah, ‘Dug-e Wahdat’.

¹⁰³ For *charas* sellers, see Nasiri, *Dastur*, 51. By the seventeenth century, ‘*charas*’ would come to be enjoyed along with tobacco in the Safavid state.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Ubayd Zakani, *Kulliyat*, 288.

came to power in the short-lived state of the Sarbadar dynasty in Khurasan, we are told that he took drastic measures 'to stamp out prostitution and traffic in drugs and liquor' that were evidently considerable across the region. Some 'five hundred whores were thrown down a well' in Sabzavar alone, even as he waged an unsuccessful campaign to eradicate wine and *bang* from the country.¹⁰⁵ When 'Ali Mu'ayyad (r. 1364–76, 1379–86), another zealous ruler of the Sarbadars, assumed power in the second half of the century, he underscored his religious fervour by making a show of his abstinence from *bang* and wine. Both drugs had evidently become very important to the culture of the ruling elites by this time.¹⁰⁶ The open hostility of the conservative elements in this period can be seen in the very strong language they used against the drug as well. A certain Muhammad Ibrahim Sarmadi (fl. 791? AH/1389? CE), for instance, compared the consumption of *bang* with incest and irreligion. 'One [single] bite of *bang*', he stressed, 'is like fornicating with one's mother seventy times, and one who fornicates with one's mother once is like having destroyed the [sacred House of God] Ka'ba seventy times'.¹⁰⁷

Despite such vehement opposition from certain orthodox religious groups, one gets the impression that some consumers took up *bang* because they thought it was technically 'permissible' in society at large. Just as was the case with opium, there was indeed no explicit reference to the substance in the canonical texts of Islam. It was hence possible for some to contend that the conservative groups had no justification for their opposition. This much was, for example, suggested in a work by a certain Sa'd al-Din b. Baha' al-Din, who flourished sometime in the thirteenth to the fourteenth centuries. The author composed a poetic disputation between *bang* and wine, in which the former mocks the latter with a series of claims that culminates in the following statement: 'in the religious writings it has been repeatedly stated that it is you [that is, wine] that is forbidden [in society]; / it is you [not me] that is prohibited unequivocally by law, reason, and religion'.¹⁰⁸ A similar point was made by Khvaja 'Ubayd al-Din (d. 1285–86), a

¹⁰⁵ Khvandamir, *Tarikh*, vol. 3, 363; and John M. Smith, *The History of the Sarbadar Dynasty 1336–1381 A.D. and Its Sources* (The Hague: Mouton, 1970), 131.

¹⁰⁶ Khvandamir, *Tarikh*, vol. 3, 366.

¹⁰⁷ Sarmadi, 'Tanbih al-ghafilin', folio 51.

¹⁰⁸ Sa'd al-Din b. Baha' al-Din, known as Sa'd-i Baha', 'Munazara-yi sharab va hashish', in *Safina-yi Tabriz*, ed. Abu al-Majd Muhammad b. Mas'ud Tabrizi (Tehran: Markaz-i Nashr-i Danishgahi, 2002), folio 240.

thirteenth-century author, who composed a separate poetic disputation between the two intimate drugs. In this case, *bang* taunts wine by saying that ‘it is on your face that is written the [Qur’anic verse] “Approach not prayers ...” / and it is you that is known as the mother of all sins’.¹⁰⁹ Notwithstanding the aesthetic and literary character of these poems, they reflected the position of certain consumers of *bang* in the late medieval period. The quasi-legality of the substance, in other words, appears to have made it into a more acceptable replacement for alcohol, at least in some social circles.

The connection that people drew between the two drugs could also be observed in the ways they prepared *bang*, which seem to have mimicked the appearance and effects of alcohol. Some, for example, ‘cooked’ hemp leaves in water or milk and then mixed the intoxicating tonic with different spices they liked. The product was something not dissimilar to mulled wine, which was quite popular in this period.¹¹⁰ Others took *bang* with cold and diluted yogurt, which was not unlike having *fuqqa* and *buza*. Brushing aside the religious justification for intermittent bans on intoxicants, some consumed *bang* and alcohol together. People, as we have seen earlier, dissolved *bang* extracts in alcohol as well or took pills of processed *bang* with a sip of wine. *Bang* consumption, in other words, appears to have been, just like opium use, an extension of alcohol consumption or at times a technically ‘legal’ equivalent to it. This affinity that people saw between the two drugs is suggested in many contemporary sources. The best examples, however, come from a new genre of writing that emerged in the late medieval period and that styled itself ‘poetic disputation’ (*munazira*) between *bang* and *bada* (wine).¹¹¹ Two examples of this genre we have cited above. A third instance comes from the pen of the eminent Azeri poet, Muhammad Fuzuli, who completed his Turkish couplets, somewhat prosaically entitled *Bang va bada*, around 1508. A devout Twelver

¹⁰⁹ Khvaja ‘Ubayd al-Din, ‘Munazara-yi sharab va hashish’, in *Safina-yi Tabriz*, folio 240. The Qur’anic verse mentioned in this line is the following: ‘O ye true believers, approach not prayers when ye are drunken (“*antum sukara*”), but wait till ye can understand what ye utter’ (Qur’an 4:43). This verse contains one of several references in the Qur’an that seem to discourage or prohibit alcohol.

¹¹⁰ Omidsalar, ‘Dug-e Wahdat’.

¹¹¹ The affinity that people saw between *bang* and alcohol can also be seen in the following reference in ‘Ubayd Zakani, where the author advises the reader (somewhat sarcastically) to ‘treat nicely [your] wine sellers and *bang* sellers [as if the substances and their specific retailers were somehow intimately connected to one another], so that you would guarantee [your uninterrupted] delight’; ‘Ubayd Zakani, *Kulliyat*, 323.

Shiite, Fuzuli may have dedicated this work to the Safavid Shah Ismaʿil I (r. 1501–24) whom he admired and supported politically.¹¹² As a resident of Iraq for much of his life, the author must have felt relieved to have witnessed Ismaʿil capturing and then integrating Baghdad into a nascent Shiite empire. For this and other reasons, Fuzuli composed his poetic disputation in such a way that wine and its numerous virtues represented the champion of his faith while *bang* personified the character and qualities of the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid II (r. 1481–1512), who was the shah's arch-nemesis in the Sunni world. The polemic and sectarian subtext of this work notwithstanding, it illustrates once again the connection that people often drew between the two drugs. One also gets the impression that Fuzuli's overarching argument that wine was in every respect superior and preferable to *bang* displayed wider social concern for the ever more prominent place of the latter drug in society.

Regardless of such growing anxiety, the popularity of the substance remained a feature of the Iranian lands during the early modern period. By the sixteenth century, for example, the Safavid shahs and princes could not come of age without toying with the drug.¹¹³ A case in point was Tahmasp I (r. 1525–76), who implied in his autobiography that he was an avid consumer of the substance. He noted that, when he was 20 years old, he resolved to abstain from wine, *bang*, other intoxicants, and what he considered to be promiscuous sexual liaisons. His repentance, which had a combination of personal and political reasons, was then celebrated in a memorable quatrain:

For a time we were after the emerald powder.
 For a time we polluted [ourselves] with the liquid ruby.
 It was pollution regardless of what color.
 We have herewith washed it away with the water of repentance.¹¹⁴

The cryptic references to 'the emerald powder' and 'the liquid ruby' were, as explained further below, euphemisms for *bang* and wine. The king was,

¹¹² Muhammad Fuzuli Baghdadi, *Bang va bada*, ed. Husayn Muhammadzada Sadiq (Tehran: Yaran, 2011). See also a short piece on *bang* and its prohibition dated to the twelfth century AH/seventeenth–eighteenth centuries CE in MS No. F2817/3, D/2157, 5/12817, folios 17–18 in the National Library of Iran.

¹¹³ Browne, *A Literary History*, vol. 4, 87; and Jaʿfariyan, *Safawiyya*, vol. 1, 371–381. See also the use of hempseeds (*bazr al-bang*) in the Safavid court in Nur Allah Tabbakh, *Du risala*, 148, 165, 166, 173, 178.

¹¹⁴ Shah Tahmasp Safavi, *Tazkira-yi Shah Tahmasb*, ed. Amr Allah Sifri (Tehran: Sharq, 1984), 30; and Hasan Bayg Rumulu, *Ahsan al-tavarikh*, ed. ʿAbd al-Karim Navaʿi (Tehran: Babak, 1978), 323.

in other words, acknowledging a period in his life when he was preoccupied with things that must have shamed him later in life. The popularity of *bang* in the early modern period was not, however, limited to the circles of the ruling elites. It was in fact the influence of the substance in society that concerned some Safavid rulers and statesmen who sought at different times to control *bang* consumption within their realm. This was, for example, the case with the issuance of a short-lived public ban on the use of this and other intoxicants by Tahmasp himself.¹¹⁵ Such edicts and restraints notwithstanding, the consumption of *bang* continued to expand. If some rulers interdicted intoxicants, others remained partial to them. To cite two of many Safavid shahs who were dependent on drugs, we may refer to Isma'īl II (r. 1576–77), who was reported to have been addicted to *Faluniya*, which, as we observed earlier, was an infusion made of hempseeds and opium juice.¹¹⁶ Safi (r. 1629–42) was likewise attached to heavy drinking and opium abuse, in which he took part with his courtiers on a regular basis.¹¹⁷

Despite the issuance of intermittent bans on drug consumption, we know also that, by the Safavid period, there was one or more *bang khanas* ('hemp' chambers) in most urban centres of the country where people took part in consuming various derivatives of this substance in public. The appearance of these specialized retailers—along with *bang* and *charas* sellers that had emerged much earlier—indicated that a supply chain had now developed that could move *bang* from the point of production (presumably in the suburbs or the countryside) to major population centres of the Safavid state. Like wine shops, beer houses, opium dens, and concoction houses that we noted earlier, *bang khanas* were turned into an economic resource for the central government because they were subject to regular taxation.¹¹⁸ The production and sale of *bang* and its derivatives were thus part of the revenue structure of Safavid Iran, even as their consumption had become an aspect of the everyday culture and economy of many households in the country.

¹¹⁵ Ja'fariyan, *Safaviyya*, vol. 1, 371–409. It is interesting to note that the public ban introduced by Tahmasp appears to not have targeted opium. It did, however, prohibit all other intoxicants including *bang* and alcohol.

¹¹⁶ Munshi, *Tarikh*, vol. 1, 218; see also Emperor Jahangir, *The Tuzuk-i Jahangiri or Memoirs of Jahangir*, trans. Alexander Rogers (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1909), 308–310.

¹¹⁷ Rudi Mathee, *Persia in Crisis: Safavid Decline and the Fall of Isfahan* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012), 36.

¹¹⁸ Keyvani, 'Artisans and Guild Life', 63.

The taboo and the smoke

The integration of *bang* into several different spheres of Iranian culture notwithstanding, the popularity of the substance seems to have been most dominant among the lower and rougher segments of society. The antinomian Sufis, the street toughs, and still others who were thought to represent 'the low culture' of the street were evidently the most noted consumers by the late medieval and early modern periods.¹¹⁹ This phenomenon eventually led to a negative reputation for the drug. Many, in other words, thought that *bang* was in effect below the station of upstanding members of the community or that of the social elites. When the latter did enjoy the substance openly, they were seen in an unfavourable light and as prone to excessive pleasure. In characterizing the reign of an early fifteenth-century ruler in Fars, for example, one historian stressed his inordinate attachment to *bang*, wine, opium, and *taft* (an intoxicating and hemlock-like plant), as well as his preoccupation with sex to have been the main reasons he could not establish order in his realm.¹²⁰ In a similar vein, an increasing number of poets, writers, and historians in the late medieval and early modern periods considered *bang* an indelicate, dangerous, or nefarious consumable. This negative reputation is evident in the ways they often referred to the substance. Sa'di, for instance, compared the drug unfavourably with wine and stressed that consuming it was below the station of a refined man:

If you are a [decent] human, have a cup of rose-colored wine.
 Drink it while listening to the cry of the flute and the tune of the harp.
 But if you have *bang*, you will be immobile like stone.
 And if you in fact eat *bang*, you may as well eat stone.¹²¹

The main point of this quatrain comes in the final hemistich, where the pun on the phrase 'eat stone' could also be translated as 'hit by stone'. If this meaning of the closing phrase is considered, the last hemistich could then be an allusion to the possible maltreatment of *bang* users in society. In either case, it is clear that even a worldly thinker like Sa'di had serious reservations about the value of a recreational drug like *bang*.

¹¹⁹ See, for example, 'Ubayd Zakani, *Kulliyat*, 288, 311, 322, 323.

¹²⁰ Hafiz-i Abru, *Jughrafiya-yi Hafiz-i Abru*, ed. Sadiq Sajjadi, vol. 2 (Tehran: Miras-i Maktub, 1996), 349–350.

¹²¹ Sa'di, *Kulliyat*, 1032.

Such strong criticisms of consumers were not advanced only by the intellectuals and the literati. Throughout much of the periods under consideration, the orthodox religious groups were also quite active in pushing back against the growing influence of *bang* in the Iranian world. As noted earlier, they composed treatises that in part or in whole attacked the popular consumption of the substance. They also used their positions and connections in society, and their venerated institutions—from mosques and seminaries to holy shrines and beyond—to promote their views against *bang*. Although the conservative classes often advocated a blanket rejection of all intoxicants, they seem to have reserved their fiercest objections for *bang*, which they considered (perhaps more than alcohol and opium) to be degenerate, spiritually deadly, and connected to a series of social ills that included crime, sexual misconduct, and even political unrest.¹²² The vehemence with which these elements opposed the drug appeared not unrelated to the association of *bang* with the threatening heterodox beliefs and practices of antinomian Sufis, who were some of the most noted consumers of the substance. Despite the hostility of the orthodox religious groups, these Sufis remained acceptable in society at large and even quite popular in certain quarters. For their part, the political authorities too attacked the popular consumption of *bang* in the late medieval and early modern periods. However, their opposition was at best intermittent and mirrored that against alcohol and opium. They appear to have been motivated to a large extent by the political upshot of *bang* consumption especially among the rowdiest elements in society.¹²³

It seems that a combination of these and possibly other factors eventually made *bang* into a cultural taboo of sorts. This was evident, for example, in that the more ‘respectable’ classes who were still interested in the substance—that is, some among the literati, the mainstream Sufis, and the social elites—began to have it in private or in small groups of intimate friends. To be discreet when consuming the drug became the norm, it seems, as indicated in the following directions by Awhad al-Din Kirmani (d. 1166 or 1238), the great Sufi poet of the twelfth century:

If you eat *bang*, have it in the name of the beauty of the good.
 Drink it according to the manner I instruct you to have.

¹²² See, for example, Muhammad Qasim b. Muhammad Sharif, ‘Faza’il al-salavat’, MS No. IR10-40591/511362 in the Majlis Library and Archives, where the author equates the consumption of *bang* and wine with murder and a whole host of other vices.

¹²³ Ja’fariyan, *Safaviyya*, vol. 1, 375, 402, 407.

Do not have too much [of it], do not advertise [your taking of it], and do not pray [while stoned].

Have a little [of it], and have [it] every now and then, and have [it] clandestinely.¹²⁴

It was against this background that many poets, writers, and historians started to employ a wide range of literary devices to convey the nature of their experience with the substance.¹²⁵ In the late medieval and early modern periods, there were few authors like Kirmani who could openly celebrate consuming *bang*. People who wrote negatively of the drug did refer to it openly. But those who wanted to mention its virtues had vague, elliptical, or euphemistic references to it.¹²⁶ Such allusions varied greatly, but they seem to have stressed the green colour, the evidently Indian background of the plant—*Cannabis indica* may have had its origins in South Asia—or alternatively a secret, exotic, and inexplicable quality that many attached to its substance. Terms and phrases such as the ‘weed’ (*sabzak*), the ‘parrot’ (*tuti*), the ‘green parrot’ (*tuti-yi sabz*), the ‘mysteries’ (*asrar*), the ‘leaf of mystical vision’ (*varaḡ al-khayal*), the ‘parrot that divulges mysteries’ (*tuti-yi guya-yi asrar*), the ‘master sayyid’ (*aqā-yi sayyid*), the ‘emerald’ (*zumurrud*, *zabarjad*), the legendary ‘Rustam’s green tent’ (*khiyāma-yi sabz-i Rustam*), the ‘divine water of life’ (*ab-i Khizr*), and the like were some of the common expressions that invoked the image of *bang* in contemporary literature.¹²⁷ The following line from the opening of the lyric by Hafiz that was cited earlier is a case in point: ‘O parrot who utter [divine] mysteries! / May your beak never be devoid of sugar’.¹²⁸ Although written ambiguously, the poem, it seems, was meant to celebrate the mystical properties of *bang*.

In the rich lexicon of vague and inoffensive expressions that referred to *bang*, the connection between the latter and the emerald was manifestly very close. This association led ultimately to the development of a double meaning for the term *huqqa* (that is, ‘hookah’), which originally

¹²⁴ Kirmani, *Divan*, 311.

¹²⁵ The negative reputation of *bang* may also be seen in a series of derisive references to *bang* users in Muhammad Yusuf Valih Isfahani, *Khuld-i barin*, ed. Mir Hashim Muhaddis (Tehran: Mahmud Afshar, 1993), 639–647; on these pages, the author describes an antinomian Sufi rebellion whose main supporters apparently consumed quite a bit of *bang*; see also Munshi, *Tarikh*, vol. 1, 117, 272, 274, 275.

¹²⁶ This was the case in medieval Arabic literature as well; Rosenthal, *The Herb*, 19–41.

¹²⁷ Browne, *A Literary History*, vol. 2, 205; Mahjub, ‘Taryak’, 71; and A’lam, ‘Bang’.

¹²⁸ Hafiz, *Divan*, 288; cf. Edward G. Browne, *A Year amongst the Persians* (n.p.: Elibron Classics, 2005), 521, n. 1.

meant a casket or a round box that served as the container of emeralds and other precious stones but, by the late medieval period, had come to denote a receptacle for *bang* and other psychoactive substances.¹²⁹ The term would soon be used to refer to the water pipe—one of the most popular devices for the consumption of tobacco and a key symbol of modern consumer culture under the Safavids—whose bowl-like base appeared like a holder of jewels or a container of recreational drugs. It is also possible that the smoking device that came to be known as the hookah was developed first for the consumption of *bang* in the late medieval period. One historian has, for example, pointed out that the poetry of the pre-modern period appears to provide some of the earliest allusions to the smoking of *bang* with a water pipe. A quatrain in the work of the fourteenth-century Timurid poet, Sadr al-Din Rabi'i Bushanji, seems to be one of the first known textual references to the device:

The toper, even if rich, will go bankrupt [one day],
 while by his drunken brawls the world will be inflamed.
 In the ruby casket (*huqqa*) I pour the kind of emeralds,
 which blind the serpent-like eyes of my sorrow.

Following Edward G. Browne's interpretation of these lines in his literary history of Iran in the medieval period, we could read the last two hemistiches of the poem as alluding to the smoking of *bang*, the latter being compared to emeralds, while the fiery pipe bowl of the hookah is likened to a ruby casket.¹³⁰

It is of course not implausible that the recreational use of *bang* in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries involved the smoking of the drug—at least on occasion and in certain quarters—and not just ingesting it. Indulgence in the fumes of hempseeds and other substances appears to have had a long history among various Iranian people and tribes. In the fifth century BCE, Herodotus reported that 'the Scythians take cannabis seeds, crawl in under the felt blankets, and throw the seeds on to the glowing stones. The seeds then emit dense smoke and fumes,

¹²⁹ See a more specific example of the use of the term *huqqa* as a container of psychoactive drugs in Munshi, *Tarikh*, vol. 1, 520; Munshi, *Tarikh*, 218; and Rosenthal, *The Herb*, 63.

¹³⁰ Browne, *A Literary History*, vol. 3, 150–151. Bushanji was a panegyrist of Fakh al-Din b. Rukn al-Din (r. 1295–1308), the Kurt ruler of the Ilkhanid vassal state in Khurasan, who was reportedly addicted to *bang*. See also Floor, 'The Art of Smoking', 48.

much more than any vapour-bath in Greece. The Scythians shriek with delight at the fumes'.¹³¹ Smoking was likewise popular among the Massagetae, who were a nomadic people of Iranian origin based in the east of the Caspian Sea, in the southeast of the Aral Sea, and between the Oxus and the Jaxartes Rivers. 'They have ... discovered a kind of plant', Herodotus explained,

whose fruit they use when they meet in groups. They light a bonfire, sit around it, throw this fruit on the fire, and sniff the smoke rising from the burning fruit they have thrown on to the fire. The fruit is the equivalent there to wine in Greece: they get intoxicated from the smoke, and then they throw more fruit on to the fire and get even more intoxicated, until they eventually stand up and dance, and burst into song.¹³²

It appears, in other words, that the practice of smoking was not uncommon among Iranians in the ancient period. Archaeological evidence seems to corroborate this, as it shows that hemp-inhaling equipment was in use in the Pazyryk kurgans far to the east in the Altai mountains.¹³³ It is possible that this ancient legacy of smoking was carried into the medieval period in certain parts of the eastern Islamic lands. Making use of the fumes of burned plants was indeed not uncommon in Iran throughout these centuries. The smoke of burned Resedas, junipers, Boswellia, amber, tamarisks, and incense, to give just a few examples, had a variety of medical, sanitary, and cultural purposes in the medieval period.¹³⁴ Similarly, the smoke of *bang* was used for medicinal and possibly other purposes. This is suggested, for example, in a sixteenth-century medical treatise on opium which explains that 'the smoke' of *bang* was used commonly to subside toothache and other oral pain and complications.¹³⁵ Such use of the smoke of *bang* could justify the otherwise inexplicable association that exists in medieval Persian poetry between hashish and fire. One representative example that suggests a link between the two comes from the work of the twelfth-century poet, Awhad al-Din Anvari (1126–89). In a panegyric ode that praises a high-ranking official in the Saljuq state, he recorded

¹³¹ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 259.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 89.

¹³³ Renate Rolle, *The World of the Scythians*, translated by F. G. Walls (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 93–94.

¹³⁴ See, for example, the relevant entries in al-Haravi, *al-Abniyya*.

¹³⁵ Shirazi, *Risala-yi afyuniyya*, 136.

the following line: 'Your wrath and your enemy are like fire and hashish. / Your love and your hatred are like virtue and sin'.¹³⁶ In another panegyric ode, he likewise wrote: 'The life and wealth of the enemy are burning and melting day and night / just like fire in hashish and salt in water'.¹³⁷ Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207–73), the great Sufi poet of the thirteenth century, saw a similar connection as well. In one story from his *Masnawi*, we hear about a royal clown who generates a great deal of public agitation and disturbance in an attempt to convey a rather trivial report to the king. Upon learning about the contents of his message, the monarch responds: 'For this little unworthy [news], oh you buffoon! / You have put fire in this land and in this hashish'.¹³⁸ These references, in other words, point to a possible connection between hashish and fire that was readily understandable to the average readers in the medieval period.

A developing drug culture

In light of the above discussion, it is possible to conclude that, by the early sixteenth century, a well-developed culture and economy of recreational drug use had taken root in Iranian society. This consumer culture revolved around the mass production of and the ever-widening demand for a number of psychoactive substances, the most important of which were alcohol, opium, and *bang*. These recreational drugs were associated closely with one another, as they were often taken together or appeared similar to one another. A variety of spices (such as cinnamon, nutmeg, cardamom, and pepper), stimulants (such as sugar or *taff*), and appliances (such as the hookah or the dishes of opium and *bang*) were also used for the preparation of and indulgence in these products. This culture of drug use had emerged slowly over the course of the previous centuries and was embedded in a diverse social environment. The rich, the poor, and those from the middling layers of society had all integrated these substances into their lives. Many social groups, in other words, depended on these consumables as their key apparatus of entertainment and leisure. It was in part because of their increasing

¹³⁶ Awhad al-Din Anvari, *Divan-i Anvari*, vol. 1 (Tehran: Bangah-i Tarjuma va Nashr-i Kitab, 1958), 420.

¹³⁷ Awhad al-Din Anvari, *Divan-i Anvari*, ed. Sa'id Nafisi (Tehran: Intisharat-i Sikka-Piruz, 1985), 178.

¹³⁸ Mawlana Jalal al-Din Muhammad Balkhi, *Masnawi-yi ma'navi*, ed. Reynold Nicholson and Badi' al-Zaman Furuzanfar (Tehran: Salis, 2000), 999.

influence in society that alcohol, opium, and *bang* drew growing opposition from the religious and temporal authorities. Despite their objections, however, more and more people succumbed to the seductions of these recreational substances. The spread and popularity of global drug foods such as coffee and tobacco in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries should thus be understood against the backdrop of a society that had developed an elaborate culture and economy of recreational substance use in the medieval period. When introduced in the Safavid state, the new drugs were hence not rejected as ‘alien’ products. Instead, they appeared in so many ways similar to alcohol, opium, and *bang*, and, as such, somewhat familiar and safe. People took up the new drugs, and considered them to supplement or replace the older substances with which they were more familiar. In the process, the old and new drugs forged an ever-thriving market that shocked and worried once again the more conservative elements in society.

The connections that people drew between the old and new substances are perhaps best illustrated in the case of coffee, which was initially considered to be a variety of wine. The common terms for coffee in fact testified to this link. ‘*Qahwa*’, the Arabic word for the beverage that came to be used in Persian as well, was a term that had been given previously to ‘a form of wine that was bitter’.¹³⁹ Another term that people started to use for the new substance was the ‘wine of Arabs’ (*khamr al-‘Arab*). Many also thought that the two drinks were similar in terms of their effects. Just like wine, coffee was thought to reduce pain and bring about joy and gladness of heart and, just like wine, it soon became an essential element of all ‘festive parties’ (*majalis-i uns*) among the elites and the non-elites.¹⁴⁰ The association between the two drinks, moreover, led some to consider coffee an appropriate substitute for wine—a beverage that continued to draw some opposition from the orthodox religious classes.¹⁴¹ From very early on, most people understood that coffee was not intoxicating and, as such, they thought its use was religiously permissible. Some jurists and religious scholars had in fact sanctioned its consumption.¹⁴² This development

¹³⁹ Hakim Qazi son of Hakim Kashfa-yi Yazdi, ‘Risala-yi chub-i Chini va khavass va dastur-i khurdan-i an va qahva va chay’, folio 25 in MS No. 10-10340IR in the Majlis Library and Archives.

¹⁴⁰ Salik al-Din Hamavi Yazdi, ‘Risala fi qahva va chay’, folios 69–70, MS No. B. or. 205–06 in the Leipzig University Library; and Shirazi, *Risala-yi afjuniyya*, 167.

¹⁴¹ Al-i Dawud, ‘Coffee’; and Van Arendonk, ‘Kahwa’.

¹⁴² Falsafi, ‘Tarikh’, 260.

encouraged the popular interest in the new substance as a replacement product for wine. As the Austrian envoy, Georg Tectander, reported in a likely reference to coffee, Iranians began to drink ‘boiled water with all kinds of spices’ as an alternative to wine, which some considered to be forbidden.¹⁴³ When the seventeenth-century Safavid poet, Mirza Muhammad Tahir Nasrabadi, stopped consuming wine, opium, and other common intoxicants, he too turned to coffee and found a more refined company in the coffeehouses.¹⁴⁴ The close association between coffee and wine can also be seen in the opposition of some people to the new beverage. With the expansion of popular demand for coffee, certain men and women began to caution against the harmful consequences of the new substance for social reproduction. They pointed out that coffee had an adverse impact on the ‘sexual appetite’ of people and caused the ‘reduction of fluid’ from both men and women. One popular line that was evidently recited in public (perhaps in certain city quarters or on the streets) stressed this matter very clearly: ‘That black-faced thing which is called coffee (*qahva*) / hinders sleep and cuts [sexual] desire’.¹⁴⁵ Those who opposed the new substance for this reason preferred the original wine as a more appropriate social drink.¹⁴⁶ Others like Hakim Qazi Yazdi, on the other hand, thought the very opposite. Favouring coffee over wine, he cited a number of cases in which individuals, after having coffee, experienced drowsiness or an increase in their sexual drive.¹⁴⁷ Varied as these references and testimonies tend to be, they nonetheless show that coffee and wine were seen as somehow connected to one another. One in fact replaced or supplemented the other.

¹⁴³ Georg Tectander, *Eine abenteuerliche Reise durch Russland nach Persien, 1602–1604*, ed. Dorothea Muller-Ott (Tulln: Dr. D. Ott-Verlag, 1978), 65–66, quoted in Matthee, *The Pursuit*, 147. This drink may have been known as ‘*qishr*’, which was brewed from the husks of the coffee beans, or possibly a similar drink made from ‘*kafta*’, that is, the leaves of the shrub now called ‘*qat*’ or ‘*khat*’ (*Catha edulis*), which was native to the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula; Al-i Dawud, ‘Coffee’; Shirazi, *Risala-yi afyuniyya*, 166; and Yazdi, ‘Risala’, folio 8. For an analysis of the consumption of qat in the contemporary Middle East, see Philip Robins, *Middle East Drugs Bazaar: Production, Prevention, and Consumption* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 61–76.

¹⁴⁴ Mirza Muhammad Tahir Nasrabadi Isfahani, *Tazkira-yi Nasrabadi* (Tehran: Armaghan, 1938), 457–460.

¹⁴⁵ Hakim Qazi, ‘Risala’, folio 25.

¹⁴⁶ Yazdi, ‘Risala’, folio 7; and Jan Janszoon Struys, *The Perillous and Most Unhappy Voyages of John Struys* (London: Samuel Smith, 1684), 320.

¹⁴⁷ Hakim Qazi, ‘Risala’, folio 25.

People, in addition, drew links between the properties of coffee, opium, and *bang*. Some consumers like 'Imad al-Din Shirazi considered coffee to have much benefit for the body while it caused 'addiction far less than the opiates'. In an attempt to manage his own opium addiction, Shirazi described that he introduced into his diet coffee and other concoctions, which he thought could manage his withdrawal symptoms.¹⁴⁸ Others thought that 'coffee could [actually] cause the stopping of opium addiction',¹⁴⁹ which had become evidently a common problem in society by this time. People also noted the similarities that existed in the ways opium, *bang*, and coffee were made and served. The manifestly identical methods of preparation involved 'boiling' in water the specific substance along with some choice spices. This common manner of preparation prompted many to start putting opium or *bang* in their coffee pots while brewing the daily dose of their favourite beverage.¹⁵⁰ Alternatively, they would take their pills of opium or *bang* along with coffee just as they used to take them with wine.

Such connections between the older drugs and coffee soon turned the earliest coffeehouses into an extension of taverns, opium dens, and 'hemp' chambers. The same social groups that frequented those spaces now started to visit the new public venues that had proliferated across the Safavid state.¹⁵¹ This development is implied or pointed out in many contemporary sources. A case in point is the writing of Muhammad 'Ali Qazvini in the seventeenth century, who considered coffeehouses (especially those in Isfahan) to be filled with opium, *bang*, and tobacco addicts, as well as those who engaged in gambling and other 'unseemly' conduct. In a style that echoed back to the eleventh-century *Qabusnama*, he cautioned his son to stay away from these places:

Lest you step in the coffeehouses and occupy yourself with socializing, making merry, and having opium with the [so-called] coffeehouse friends (*garan-i qahwa-nashin*). A person who spent two days in a coffeehouse has never come to himself, and one who has learned [in such a place] about hilarity and opium has [all but] lost oneself The person who has sit in good conversations in a coffeehouse will see no benefit from [his] life, and one who has lost the gamble of friendship and association [with the coffeehouse friends] will no longer be of use [in life].¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Shirazi, *Risala-yi afyuniyya*, 168–169.

¹⁴⁹ Hakim Qazi, 'Risala', folio 25.

¹⁵⁰ Yazdi, 'Risala', folio 9; and Al-i Dawud, 'Coffee'.

¹⁵¹ Mirza Bayg Hasan Junabadi, *Ruza al-Safaviyya* (Tehran: Mahmud Afshar, 1999), 761–762, 772.

¹⁵² Qazvini, 'Dar mazirrat', 372–274.

Such sentiment, which was by no means limited to Qazvini, showed that the consumption of coffee was now taken up by many who simultaneously (or previously) enjoyed the older substances. Coffee, nonetheless, attracted more ‘refined’ consumers as well—that is, people who did not necessarily attend taverns, opium dens, or ‘hemp’ chambers. It was not uncommon to see poets, writers, storytellers, religious scholars, philosophers, artists, and musicians in the coffeehouses as well. Even the Safavid shahs and princes, their domestic guests, and special foreign dignitaries could be entertained in these venues.¹⁵³ Such open mixing of different classes of society was not ever possible in the spaces associated with the older drugs. It was as if coffee, with its socially appropriate position, had forged one of the few public spaces where a balance of the low and high culture of early modern urban society could be maintained.

But coffee was not the only new substance that was linked to the old drugs used widely in society. People likewise drew parallels between tobacco and the more traditional substances. Some medical authorities such as the seventeenth-century physician Husam al-Din Machini believed that tobacco was beneficial for most people and did not have all the threatening properties of alcohol, opium, or *bang*.¹⁵⁴ The common people, on the other hand, seem to have thought that the new substance was a less addictive, dangerous, or scandalous alternative to the older drugs, and yet it had their most important and beneficial qualities. They, for example, believed that the new product calmed the nerve in times of distress and served as an appropriate accompaniment to recreation and leisure. One folk poem that had become popular during this time illustrated this point more clearly. It announced: ‘To ward off sorrow you should smoke tobacco; / you should find a beautiful companion and smoke [it] with her’.¹⁵⁵ The line harked back to some of the literary references to wine, opium, or *bang* in the medieval period that stressed the benefits or the specific manner of consuming these drugs. Some people, in addition, recognized a special affinity between tobacco and *bang*. The two drugs appeared similar to one another in their very methods of consumption; they both could be smoked rather than ingested. This resemblance prompted some to refer to tobacco as ‘hashish’, especially when the new substance was just

¹⁵³ Falsafi, ‘Tarikh’, 261–267.

¹⁵⁴ Husam al-Din Mutabbib Machini, ‘Risala-yi tambaku’, folios, 88–91, MS No. 846361 in the Majlis Library and Archives.

¹⁵⁵ Machini, ‘Risala-yi tambaku’, folio 88.

beginning to make its way in society. The seventeenth-century religious scholar Sayyid Ni'mat Allah Jaza'iri (d. 1112 AH/1700–01), for instance, noted in his work that his contemporaries consumed a product they called 'hashish' and yet some also referred to it as 'tutun' (the latter being a variety of tobacco that was smoked with portable pipes rather than hookahs). In distinguishing between tobacco and *bang*, Jaza'iri pointed out that 'this type of substance was not in use in the past and only in this century [that is, the eleventh century AH] has come about ... [More precisely] this [drug] came about in the first decade after the [Islamic] millennium [namely the years from 1591 to 1602]'. Suggesting that people in Iran were not unfamiliar with the practice of smoking, he then went on to say that certain old smoking 'devices' had been found in ancient 'wells and [historical] excavations', but these instruments may or may not have been designed for the consumption of tobacco.¹⁵⁶ The implication was, in other words, that they may have been used for another consumable such as hashish. Such careful differentiation between the two drugs notwithstanding, many people continued to see them as similar or complementary. This affinity soon prompted some to begin smoking tobacco and *bang* together.¹⁵⁷ This development was reported in a number of contemporary sources including the travel account of the Englishman John A. Fryer, who observed in 1676–77 that Iranians often smoked tobacco mixed with leaves and flowers of *bang*.¹⁵⁸

The connections between tobacco and the older drugs were quite strong when it came to alcohol as well. We know, for example, that, in certain circles, the two substances often accompanied one another. When, in 1584, Muhammad Khudabanda (r. 1578–87) arrived in Tabriz, to cite one specific case, he witnessed some 'ignorant youths' who engaged in disorderly conduct in the city. We are told that they would overindulge in 'wine and the water pipe' and, while drunk, they would commit 'mischief and villainy'.¹⁵⁹ Similarly, the story of the folk hero Husayn Kurd Shabistari—developed and set during or immediately after the reign of 'Abbas I (1588–1629)—has a number of scenes where wine, distilled alcohol, tobacco, and *bang* are consumed together.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Ja'fariyan, 'Tanbaku', 265.

¹⁵⁷ See, for example, Ja'fariyan, *Safaviyya*, vol. 3, 1142.

¹⁵⁸ Matthee, *The Pursuit*, 109.

¹⁵⁹ The youths in question were evidently connected to a recalcitrant local official; Munshi, *Tarikh*, vol. 1, 297–298.

¹⁶⁰ Iraj Afshar and Mihran Afshar, eds., *Qissa-yi Husayn Kurd-i Shabistari* (Tehran: Chashma, 2006), 213, 325, 348. See also Toby Falk, ed., *Treasures of Islam* (London:

In addition, people took up smoking because, for religious or personal reasons, they wished to stop having wine.¹⁶¹ This was the case with the seventeenth-century poet, Mirza Muhammad 'Ali Sa'ib Tabrizi, who composed a short literary piece on the subject in which he explained:

It has been some days now that this wretched soul has disobeyed the order of wine, stopped drinking all the time, and instead joined the order of the mournful and the gathering of those whom tobacco burns. He has abandoned the goblet and the beauty of the cupbearer, and instead darkened his eyes with the fire and smoke of tobacco. He has left the heavenly melody of the musician and instead contented himself with the wonderful voice of the water pipe.¹⁶²

People like Sa'ib and the characters of the story of Husayn Kurd were not few in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In other words, replacing alcohol with tobacco was not uncommon just as it was not unusual for people to have them both together.

Anthropologist Peter Weston Black has argued that the culture of tobacco use in many early modern societies developed because of its ties with 'a larger cultural complex [that involved] other drug substances'.¹⁶³ In different societies, several stimulants and substances were 'joined together with tobacco' to form what Black calls 'recreational drug complexes'. These cultural and economic arrangements, he has shown, served a two-fold function. They not only facilitated the incorporation of key foreign psychotropic substances into the local and indigenous 'systems of [cultural] meanings'. They also

Sotheby's/Philip Wilson Publishers, 1985), 119; and J. M. Rogers, Filiz Cagman, Zeren Tanindi, and Topkapi Sarayi Muzesi, eds., *The Topkapi Sarayi Museum: The Albums and Illustrated Manuscripts* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1986), 124, 182, where two paintings dated to the mid-seventeenth century by the Safavid painter Muhammad Qasim Tabrizi (pupil and one of the foremost followers of the great Safavid painter Riza 'Abbasi) depict what must be idealized female courtiers in delicate clothing and graceful and inviting postures consuming tobacco by means of a water pipe or carrying it along with a wine cup.

¹⁶¹ See Mirza Muhammad 'Ali Sa'ib Tabrizi's short prose writing on wine and tobacco in MS No. 1787115, 5–18613, folios 319–323 in the National Library of Iran. See also Mirza Muhammad 'Ali Sa'ib Tabrizi, quoted in Mihdi Dirakhshan, 'Du asar-i nu yafta az nasr-i Sa'ib va sabk-i nasr-i u', *Majalla-yi Danishkada-yi Adabiyat va 'Ulum-i Inساني-yi Danishgah-i Tehran* 105 (Fall 1988): 278.

¹⁶² Muhammad 'Ali Sa'ib Tabrizi, 'Raq'a dar tark-i sharab va ta'rif-i tanbaku', folios 224–225, MS No. IR 4968/487986 in the Majlis Library and Archives.

¹⁶³ Peter Weston Black, 'The Anthropology of Tobacco Use: Tobian Data and Theoretical Issues', *Journal of Anthropological Research* 40.4 (Winter 1984): 496.

afforded them a vital economic niche because they connected the early modern global drugs to the consumption patterns of several popular native drugs. The commercial and cultural importance of such links between several different stimulants and products is also stressed by anthropologist Sidney Mintz. In his influential work on the history of sugar, Mintz has shown that its consumption facilitated the development of popular demand for a number of other commodities such as tea, coffee, and chocolate.¹⁶⁴ Historian Jan de Vries has gone even further in this line of thought and has argued that such ‘consumption bundles’ were crucial for the expansion of consumerism in the early modern period. New or old consumables on their own and separate from one another did not have as much influence in society as when they were embedded within the world of goods that allowed people to obtain and use them together.¹⁶⁵ In medieval and early modern Iran, the drugs that were often bought, sold, and consumed in close association with one another were alcohol, opium, and *bang*. By the early sixteenth century, these products had formed a cultural system that involved still other substances, intoxicants, and commodities. When tobacco and coffee were introduced in the country, they benefited greatly from this entrenched consumer culture. People drew intimate connections between the old and new drugs and the very methods, reasons, and occasions of their use. This affinity brought about a process that anchored the new products in older consumption patterns and helped indigenize them in the Safavid state. To borrow from Black once again, we can state that the already-established recreational drug complex in the late medieval and early modern periods expedited the process that integrated the new substances in society. Swiftly accomplished as it was, the social embeddedness of coffee and tobacco in turn expanded further the cultural and economic value of recreational drugs in Iran in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

A consumer revolution

The introduction of the new global drugs in the early modern period thus led to a cultural pull of psychoactive substances that had no precedent in the country. Whereas, in previous centuries, people enjoyed a variety of

¹⁶⁴ Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, 108–138.

¹⁶⁵ De Vries, *The Industrious Revolution*, 33.

more familiar recreational products and whereas they consumed a considerable amount of them, they now used so many and so much of the available substances that the scale of drug consumption dwarfed anything formerly known.¹⁶⁶

Much of this popular enthusiasm for various psychoactive consumables rested on the concurrent and mutually reinforcing use of coffee and tobacco. While the new substances served as accessories to or replacements for older drugs and while many consumed them all together, coffee and tobacco had their own intimate and productive relationship from the start. This was evident in that most people who were addicted to one had also taken up the other. As early as the first decade of the seventeenth century, for example, we see coffee and tobacco accompanying one another in public, usually in the coffeehouses that had just multiplied in the Safavid urban centres. By the middle of the century, a significant section of the social elites, the middling classes, and the working population had begun having the two products together. When the German envoy, Adam Olearius, was travelling in north and central Iran in 1636–37, for instance, he noted that ‘[t]here is hardly any Persian, what condition or quality soever he be of, but take Tobacco’.¹⁶⁷ He stressed that ‘[t]his they do in any place whatsoever, even in their *mosqueyes*’.¹⁶⁸ Giving a detailed description of the Persian manner of preparing coffee, he then added that the two new substances were in many places inseparable: ‘They Drink [coffee] with their Tobacco’¹⁶⁹ almost all the time. Likewise, in the aforementioned story of the folk hero Husayn Kurd Shabistari, we find a number of scenes where coffee and tobacco are served simultaneously; they both appear to be an integral part of the kind of diversions the working and underclass population enjoyed several times a day.¹⁷⁰ This is confirmed as well by the

¹⁶⁶ Thanks to a sophisticated network of foreign and domestic merchants that distributed the new drugs, tobacco, which was a product from the New World, and coffee, a commodity indigenous to Ethiopia and Yemen, became increasingly available in the Safavid state over the course of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. For a general history of coffee and tobacco (two key early modern drugs) in Iran, see Matthee, *The Pursuit*, 117–174; Goushegir, ‘Le Café et les cafés en Iran’, 141–176; Al-i Dawud, ‘Coffee’; Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses*; Floor, ‘The Art of Smoking’, 47–85; and Kazemi, ‘Tobacco’, 613–633.

¹⁶⁷ Adam Olearius, *The Voyages and Travells of the Ambassadors Sent by Frederick, Duke of Holstein*, trans. John Davies, 2nd edition (London: John Starkey, 1669), 240; passim.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*; passim.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*; passim.

¹⁷⁰ Afshar and Afshar, *Qissa-yi Husayn Kurd*, 415.

observations of the French merchant traveller Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, who witnessed popular consumption of the new drugs together during his extensive travels in Iran in 1631–64. He explained:

The first thing set upon the Table is the Pipe, the Tobacco, and the dish of Coffee; and indeed thus it is that they begin all their debauches They are so accustomed to take Tobacco, both men and women, that a poor tradesman that has not above five *Sous* to spend, will lay out three of them in Tobacco. If they had none, they say that they should not have *damaque* [namely *dimagh*], that is, gladness in their hearts. Many will confess that their excessive taking Tobacco is hurtful; but if you tell 'em of it, they answer in a word, *Adedehoud* [namely '*adat shud*'], 'Tis the custome [that is, it has become a habit].¹⁷¹

Such addictive use of coffee and tobacco could probably not have happened without a popular craze that created the urge for both of them at the same time and bolstered their simultaneous consumption. The mutually supporting relationship of coffee and tobacco continued throughout the remainder of the early modern period. By the end of the seventeenth century, this association had become even more entrenched. The affinity between the two drugs eventually led to the making of a social environment where people found—as one widely current aphorism stressed in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—'coffee without tobacco [to be] like meat without salt'.¹⁷²

Notwithstanding the inseparability and marriage of the new substances, there was from the outset more public interest in tobacco than in coffee. The popular demand for the latter was, to be sure, quite a lot in certain areas. Qazvini wrote disapprovingly of Isfahan and other urban areas, for example, where 'people would not have anything less than ten to fifteen cups (*piyala*) [of coffee] per day They [senselessly] imitate[d] one another [in having this beverage] ... and they ha[d] [it] regularly without any reason'.¹⁷³ Widespread as it was in the Safavid capital and in many towns and cities, coffee nevertheless had limited success among certain groups in society such as women and people living in the

¹⁷¹ Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Collections of Travels through Turkey into Persia* (London: Moses Pitt, 1684), 242. A similar statement is made in Sir John Chardin, *A New and Accurate Description of Persia*, vol. 2 (London: A. Bettesworth, 1724), 44–45.

¹⁷² Mathee, *The Pursuit*, 129–130; and Floor, *The Economy*, 141, n. 94. Writing in the early nineteenth century, Sir William Ouseley, *Travels in Various Countries of the East*, vol. 1 (London: Rodwell and Martin, 1819), 341, referred to the inseparability of the two substances and in that context cited the Persian aphorism.

¹⁷³ Qazvini, 'Dar mazirrat', 373.

countryside.¹⁷⁴ The use of tobacco, by contrast, was common among both men and women and across the socio-economic spectrum. There was really no social barrier that the substance could not cross. As early as the first decades of the seventeenth century, tobacco had, in fact, come to rival basic food items on the table of the poorest classes in society, and this remained the case throughout much of the Safavid period and after. As Fryer observed, the poor 'have they but a Penny in the World, the one half will go for Bread and dried Grapes or Butter-milk, and the other for Snow and Tobacco'.¹⁷⁵ One factor that played a crucial role in the development of such popular enthusiasm for the new substances was what historians of Europe identified as imitation. Owning water pipes, smoking tobacco, and drinking coffee gave the downtrodden classes a chance to share in the habits, taste, and behaviour of the elites and the upper classes. This was more so with respect to tobacco, which had become very fashionable in Iran throughout this period. It was as if the consumption of tobacco in and of itself gave a sense of upward mobility to the poor. However else the urban poor may have been exposed to tobacco, it seems for some that their work provided one such opportunity. In this regard, Tavernier pointed out that

there are abundance of poor people that get their living by mending glass Tobacco-pipes, for when they are brok'n they join them together again with a certain mastic made of lime, and the white of an egg, then with a Diamond-pointed piercer they make holes in the glass, and bind the pieces together with a thin Latten-wire.¹⁷⁶

Such preoccupation with tobacco and its appurtenances was not limited to the city folks. The poor in the countryside had too adopted the practice and taste of their peers in the urban areas. When the domestic production of the new product expanded from the middle decades of the seventeenth century, the rural population—especially in the many provinces that now cultivated the tobacco plant—could no longer resist the lure of the new substance; they also succumbed to the surging tobacco craze that raged across the Safavid state.

¹⁷⁴ Chardin, *A New and Accurate Description*, vol. 2, 164–165; Floor, *The Economy*, 141–142; and Matthee, *The Pursuit*, 164–165.

¹⁷⁵ John A. Fryer, *A New Account of East-India and Persia* (London: Printed by R. R., 1698), 263; see also pp. 246 and 250.

¹⁷⁶ Tavernier, *Collections of Travels*, 230.

This unusual appeal of tobacco across the geographic, demographic, and socio-economic spectrum is also reflected in the writing of Husam al-Din Machini in the seventeenth century, who stressed that

Today, tobacco has become so common and widespread [in society] that the elites and the commoners, the unschooled and the learned, the unworthy and the notable, the young and the old, the king and the vizier, as well as the affluent and the destitute in cities and in villages, in private and in public, in health and in sickness, with poverty or with wealth, whether appropriately or otherwise engage in consuming it.¹⁷⁷

In his *Hadiqa al-Shi'a*, which was written in the first half of the seventeenth century, the religious scholar 'Abd al-Hayy Razavi Kashani disclosed likewise that 'in our time there are but very few people who are not addicted to the water pipe. There is in fact no house or marketplace—belonging to the Muslims or the non-Muslims—that is devoid of water pipes'.¹⁷⁸ The transformation in the culture of drug consumption that tobacco with no small help from coffee and other substances forged was hence nothing short of a psychoactive revolution. Everyone now seemed to have developed some interest in recreational psychoactive products, especially tobacco and coffee. The secret to the popularity of the new drugs was evidently this capacity to appeal to a cross-section of Safavid society. This was most conspicuous with respect to tobacco, which alone contributed much to revolutionizing not just substance use, but also consumption patterns in early modern Iran. Unlike *bang*, tobacco was not associated with marginal groups in society. More like opium, coffee, and alcohol, but clearly far more successful, tobacco had a vast drawing power in the country. The charm and allure of the drug were such that, by the middle of the seventeenth century, the scale of its consumption overshadowed the demand for all other recreational substances. Tobacco had also accomplished what various drugs in use had not done for centuries. It had become an essential good—something necessary to be had along with basic foodstuffs, in just about all households including those of the urban poor and the peasants. The meaning and use of no other psychoactive substance had ever before or have since morphed so rapidly and so thoroughly in Iranian society.

The success of tobacco, accompanied as it was with that of coffee, had no doubt something to do with their very qualities. The new drugs seemed at once exotic and familiar, for example. They were similar to, but not

¹⁷⁷ Machini, 'Risala', folios 88–92.

¹⁷⁸ Ja'fariyan, *Safaviyya*, vol. 3, 1092.

nearly as dangerous, scandalous, or intoxicating as, alcohol, opium, or *bang*. They were clearly foreign and curious, and yet could be consumed in an indigenous fashion. Some people also believed that the new drugs had a variety of medical benefits. Tobacco, for instance, was thought to be a cure for many chronic illnesses, particularly those such as leprosy that affected skin.¹⁷⁹ More importantly, however, there was no significant legal or religious opposition to the new substances. Although there was some early and occasional hostility to coffee and tobacco, the shahs and the clerics who objected to their consumption soon yielded to the growing popular interest. By the mid-seventeenth century, in fact, many from the ruling and religious classes had themselves succumbed to the allure of the new products.¹⁸⁰ That, unlike *bang* and wine, coffee and tobacco were not perceived to be intoxicating did much to undermine the emergence of oppositional consensus among the authorities and the orthodox clerics. There were as many people in positions of power who were hostile to the new drugs as there were enchanted with them. Equally crucial with respect to tobacco was the fact that a certain amount of ease and speed distinguished its consumption from the use of coffee, alcohol, and perhaps even other drugs. Like pills of opium and *bang*, tobacco appeared peripatetic and required no more than the most rudimentary instruments. This was not the case with more stationary drugs like coffee and alcohol. The mobile nature of tobacco use and its legality helped make the substance a social glue—a public consumable unlike any others. Smoking tobacco was thus possible and common on the streets, at the court, and in the presence of the shah, or for that matter in the bazaars, seminaries, mosques, and bathhouses.¹⁸¹ It could be had while riding, walking, working, resting, or under any other circumstances.¹⁸² The portable

¹⁷⁹ Qazvini, 'Dar mazirrat', 372.

¹⁸⁰ Examples of opposition to tobacco are cited in Falsafi, 'Shah Abbas', 447–450; Rasul Ja'fariyan, 'Risala fi bayan hukm shurb al-tutun wa al-qahwa', in *Miras-i Islami-yi Iran*, vol. 7 (Qum: Kitabkhana-yi Mar'ashi Najafi, 1994), 81–92; Ja'fariyan, *Safaviyya*, vol. 3, 1091–1092, 1141–1153; Ja'fariyan, 'Tanbaku', 264–268; and Matthee, *The Pursuit*, 135–142.

¹⁸¹ See, for instance, Struys, *The Perilous and Most Unhappy Voyages*, 320; Chardin, *A New and Accurate Description*, vol. 2, 44, 199; Vladimir Minorsky, ed., *Tadkirat al-Mulkuk: A Manual of Safavid Administration (Circa 1137/1725)* (Cambridge: E. J. W. Gibb Memorial, 1980), 68, 100; and Nasr Allah Falsafi, *Zindagani-yi Shah 'Abbas-i Avval*, vol. 2 (Tehran: Danishgah-i Tehran, 1968), 278–280.

¹⁸² Cornelis de Bruyn, *A New and More Correct Translation than Has Hitherto Appeared in Public of Mr. Cornelius Le Brun's Travels* (London: J. Warcus, 1759), 208; Chardin, *A New and Accurate Description*, vol. 2, 44; and Floor, 'The Art of Smoking', 70–71.

nature of tobacco consumption allowed even soldiers to smoke while on duty, just as they used to eat opium while in the battlefields; they were said to have ‘brought their water pipes to the army and carried them with them during campaigns’.¹⁸³ In brief, while opium and other older substances shared some of these qualities, they did not possess them all at once in the way tobacco, and to some extent coffee, did.

The broad appeal of the new drugs was also related to their progressively declining prices over the course of the seventeenth century. These products had to be affordable before the majority of people could develop habits of obtaining and consuming them. We know, for example, that the cost of coffee decreased significantly over the course of this period due mostly to competition between the inter-regional merchants and wholesalers who imported and then distributed the substance inside the Safavid state.¹⁸⁴ Although a comparable set of data does not exist for tobacco, it is not unlikely that a similar trend could have developed in the early to the middle decades of the seventeenth century when tobacco was imported into the country by the same merchants and wholesalers. Besides competition, the expansion of tobacco farming throughout the century no doubt contributed to the development of lower prices as well. Because the tobacco plant was adaptable to many environmental circumstances, tobacco farming soon flourished in just about all parts of the Safavid state. That its cultivation and harvest were not inordinately complicated also encouraged landowners and peasants to expand their output.¹⁸⁵ The production of tobacco ‘throughout all Persia’¹⁸⁶—which contemporary sources tend to stress—must have cut the expenses attached to currency exchange, shipment, duties, and a long line of middlemen involved in the import of tobacco from India, the Ottoman empire, or elsewhere. By the end of the seventeenth century, one may surmise that, for the average consumer, tobacco had become cheaper per unit of consumption than coffee. This was due to the fact that, by then, the former was produced domestically while the latter was

¹⁸³ Matthee, *The Pursuit*, 128.

¹⁸⁴ In his analysis of the cost of wholesale coffee at Bandar ‘Abbas between 1638 and 1656, Rudi Matthee has shown that, due to fierce competition between European companies and Asian merchants, the prices of coffee fell to an extent that, towards the end of the century, it was no longer profitable for the Dutch and the English to remain in the trade; Matthee, *The Pursuit*, 153–155.

¹⁸⁵ Kazemi, ‘Tobacco’, 618–620.

¹⁸⁶ Chardin, *A New and Accurate Description*, vol. 2, 40.

almost entirely imported. The decreasing prices of tobacco more than coffee—and possibly more than other recreational drugs—in turn must have encouraged wider consumption of this substance.¹⁸⁷

Having emerged for a variety of reasons, the considerable pull of tobacco and coffee soon led to the unfolding of a new form of consumerism that some contemporaries found distasteful and objectionable. Opposed to the wasteful habits of smokers, Jaza'iri, for example, pointed out that 'people spend lavishly on building various devices for [their] tobacco consumption and make use of a lot of decoration and ornamentation, so much so that the total cost of various accessories [that they possess at any given point in time] would reach some 30,000 dinars'¹⁸⁸—a substantial sum at the time. This sentiment was shared by Qazvini as well, who wrote:

Tobacco is not related to any form of life necessities such as food, drink, and clothing, and yet everyone spends according to his capacity half of his own and his family's daily allowances on tobacco and its [related] appurtenances such as charcoal, glass, straw, and so forth. Others who have social status and are into extravagance spend gold and silver on [their very elaborate] water pipes, and a quite large amount on the wages of attendants [that is, holders of their expensive water pipes], their rides, and other related matters. [This is the case while] all the tradition and customs of entertaining guests—from providing soup, bread, fragrance, and so forth—have all disappeared from among people. Now [entertaining guests] is restricted simply to [offering] the water pipe but nothing else. And yet [even] this is extremely difficult [for many] because of all the waste, the lavish spending, the unnecessary destruction of wealth, and [as a result] the cessation of the livelihood of people. A [poor and lowly] assistant to a greengrocer has now ten to twenty silver water pipes at home, whose value equals the amount of money needed for the food and clothing of his entire family for one full year or the capital of a merchant who could annually earn from it a [more than] sufficient amount [of profit].¹⁸⁹

What is most striking about this passage is not just the fact that it provides a window on the magnitude of tobacco use at this early stage of its introduction in Iran. It is also that we learn about the consumption of other goods that tobacco manifestly encouraged. From charcoal and glass to elaborate pipes and hookahs, there were a series of commodities whose consumption the new drug had first increased and then

¹⁸⁷ A similar process also existed in the Ottoman empire and more broadly across the world in the early modern period; Grehan, *Everyday Life and Consumer Culture*, 147–148; Courtwright, *Forces of Habit*, 1–132.

¹⁸⁸ Ja'fariyan, 'Tanbaku', 265–266.

¹⁸⁹ Qazvini, 'Dar mazirrat', 373.

normalized. There was also an unprecedented level of self-indulgence associated with the consumption of the new recreational substances in this period, which was thought by some to come at the expense of caring for others and entertaining them. For people like Qazvini and Jaza'iri, to consume tobacco thus meant to 'waste' a great deal of financial resources and to be desensitized to some of the prevailing norms and traditions in society. However, to consume the new substance meant something quite different to the majority of people who so willingly spent their hard-earned money on tobacco and its many accompaniments. What worried social critics was, in other words, a new cultural turn that promoted an ever-widening scale of consumption and that rendered this nascent materialism—accompanied as it was by a growing sense of individualism—as something that was socially proper and morally unobjectionable.

Tobacco and its accessories aside, the consumption of other drugs had likewise become overwhelming in the early modern period. This development worried the likes of Qazvini, who saw coffee, opium, and other psychoactive products as even more harmful and threatening than tobacco. He explained:

Coffee is even deadlier than the water pipe, [but] everyone [now] drinks no less than fifteen cups a day. The nature of the drug is cold and dry, and [it] brings about a deficiency in digestion, the elimination of sleep, and the decline of sexual drive. The temperament of people has indeed changed as a result of excessive consumption of it. The [humoral] moistness which is the cause of sleep is thus reduced [that is, as a consequence of overindulgence in coffee]. People—all of them [indeed]—imitate one another and do not consider the balance of [their bodily] humors. They routinely drink coffee for no reason whatsoever, and in this way weaken their bodies and destroy their lives. [This is so while] no one [pauses to] consider its benefits or its harms, and [while no one] thinks of how much of it is enough and how much of it a lot.

Even more destructive than coffee are hilarity [*kayf*], opium [*afyun*], *barsh*, and [different types of] concoctions (*ma'jun*), through which the beauty and youth of all people have been taken away from them, and all living souls have become indistinguishable from the dead. There is no one [now] who is not polluted to one type of the many different sorts of opiates (*kuknar*), opium (*taryak*), concoctions (*ma'ajin*), and [intoxicating] blends (*tarakib*). Nor is there any value in [the users' eventual] regret, as all those who have been entrapped in such substances (singular: *mughayyar*) admit that they are all fed up with life and with living [altogether].¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ Qazvini, 'Dar mazirrat', 373–374.

The change in the consumption of psychoactive products that people like Qazvini opposed was thus quite radical. To them, the scale and normalcy of modern drug use and the new consumerism that was associated with it must have seemed incomprehensible. Nothing could have explained this cultural turn better than a profound change in the very temperament and humoral balance of people that was itself caused by a combination of the new and old drugs. Critics such as Qazvini thought as well that the modern consumption of recreational substances and other commodities had led to the destruction and deadening of people's bodies and souls. It was as if excessive self-gratification had led to an increasing abandonment of restraint in society. That was why people could not help themselves but would rather continue to indulge in such destructive behaviour.

To the more upright elements in the country, the new collective interest in psychoactive products was offensive particularly because of the economic distress and the widening wealth gap they were seeing around them in the seventeenth century.¹⁹¹ In his critique of popular drug consumption, Qazvini thus went on to speculate about the cause of the economic challenges the Safavids and others across the Middle East were experiencing. He linked the latter to the excessive consumption of recreational substances, especially tobacco:

Indeed, if people think [about it, they realize that] this destitution that has overtaken all the people of the world—both the Persians and the Arabs—has no other cause but [tobacco and] the fact that everyone has a specific amount of income [determined] by the wheel of destiny and when one spends a portion of that [money] on [such] illicit matters God does not guarantee its reimbursement [back to the person].¹⁹²

Implied as it is in the passage, the emergence of a new form of consumerism that tobacco symbolized was by no means limited to the Safavid state. It was shared across large sections of the Islamic ecumene. The new interest in spending in both Iran and beyond was unlike anything people had known before. For this reason, some like Qazvini thought that this level of drug use had something to do with another

¹⁹¹ On major economic changes of the seventeenth century, see Matthee, *Persia in Crisis*, especially 1–26, 75–108, 139–172 (Chapters 1, 4, 6); see also Muhammad-Ibrahim Bastani Parizi, *Siyasat va iqtisad dar 'asr-i Safavi* (Tehran: Safi 'Ali Shah, 1984); Stephen F. Dale, *The Muslim Empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 118–126; and Floor, *The Economy*.

¹⁹² Qazvini, 'Dar mazirrat', 373.

phenomenon that was equally new, namely the declining economic conditions of many households, countries, and kingdoms across the broader Middle East. Qazvini and others like him may have overdrawn the relationship that they saw between consumerism and economic decline. We now know, however, that they were both processes that were connected to the burgeoning globalization of trade and economies in the early modern period. We know as well from better data that we have on Europe in this period that the trade in and the acquisition of consumer goods did sometimes increase under terrible economic difficulties. In fact, as one scholar has put it, rising consumption in society ‘sometimes occurred in times of general depression and decline or failing family fortunes’.¹⁹³

Conclusion

The unfolding of a psychoactive revolution in early modern Iran should thus be understood against the backdrop of much broader demand that had developed slowly for centuries. This historical consumer culture, as we observed earlier, revolved around the mass production and the ever-deepening appeal of a number of recreational drugs, the most important of which were alcohol, opium, and *bang*. These products were often used together and along with a variety of other commodities—for example, key spices, stimulants, and instruments—that were needed for their preparation, presentation, and enjoyment. This elaborate culture of substance use was also embedded in a diverse social landscape. A growing number of different classes of people enjoyed these consumables and considered them as important components of their diversions and leisure. By the early sixteenth century, these drugs and their closely associated commodities had created a niche in the imperial economy of the Safavid state. And it was in part because of the expansion of their use in society that these psychoactive products drew intermittent opposition from the religious and temporal authorities. Such occasional censure notwithstanding, more and more people appeared to succumb to the allure of these substances. The presence of this historical and expanding consumer culture facilitated the spread and popularity of global drug foods such as coffee and

¹⁹³ Donald Quataert, ‘Introduction’, in *Consumption Studies*, 2; and Jan de Vries, ‘Between Purchasing Power and the World of Goods: Understanding the Household Economy in Early Modern Europe’, in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, 85–132.

tobacco in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. People drew numerous connections between the old and new consumables and the very methods, reasons, and occasions of their use. They also considered the new substances to supplement or replace the older ones. This affinity brought about a process that anchored the new drugs in much older consumption patterns and habits, and in effect helped indigenize and popularize them in the Safavid state.

The introduction of coffee and tobacco was soon accompanied by the mass consumption of recreational products on a scale that had no precedent in society. Excessive spending on psychoactive substances and indulgence in them had now become common in most parts of the country and among most groups of people. Nothing exposed the emergence of this new cultural turn better than the proliferation of new public spaces in the urban areas. The coffeehouses that appeared in major towns and cities in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries promoted the consumption of a variety of drugs both old and new. They also allowed, in fact encouraged, an intermixing of people across the vertical social scale. The 'respectable' and lower classes now encountered one another in these venues and were forced to the kind of sociability that was probably not possible otherwise. The coffeehouse phenomenon in and of itself was thus an unprecedented development in the country. It, however, symbolized a much deeper social and cultural change. The new era of drug consumption had, for example, turned some drugs such as tobacco into something like an essential good for just about all households in the country. Now, the poor in towns and rural areas spent a large portion of their wages, often half or more, on tobacco and various commodities and instruments needed for its enjoyment. Such increase in the demand for coffee and tobacco was by no means at the expense of other drugs. For all we know, the consumption of alcohol, opium, and *bang* also continued to expand in the early modern period. This is illustrated by the emergence of new supply networks and the proliferation of such places as *sharab khanas* (wine shops or taverns), *buza khanas* (beer houses), *kuknar khanas* (opium dens), *mājun khanas* (concoction houses), and *bang khanas* ('hemp' chambers) in many urban areas of the Safavid state. These more formal supply venues where people could gather to obtain and enjoy older drugs were in turn supplemented by a series of informal retailers and distributors that included peddlers and neighbourhood sellers.

The revolutionary expansion of substance use in the early modern period was not limited to the specific drugs discussed here. There were a variety of stimulants and other psychoactive products (from sugar to

lesser-known products such as *taft*) whose consumption accompanied that of alcohol, opium, *bang*, coffee, or tobacco, and whose demand must have increased in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Similarly, a large number of spices, appliances, and commodities—from cinnamon, nutmeg, cardamom, and pepper that people put in their coffee or intoxicating drinks to charcoal, glass, pipes, coffee dishes, and water pipes that they needed for the preparation and enjoyment of the old and new drugs—joined more common recreational substances in this new era of consumerism. The increase in demand for recreational drugs, in other words, entailed the expansion of the market for all sorts of commodities that were somehow linked to them. If the increase in the purchase and use of both recreational drugs and their allied goods are representative of the changing patterns of consumption in society, which this article has considered to be the case, then the psychoactive revolution discussed here should be seen as part and parcel of a much wider consumer revolution that engulfed early modern Iran. For all we know, the ever-increasing demand for psychoactive products and their accompaniments was in fact emblematic of a new cultural turn that promoted endless acquisition and use of all sorts of commodities. In this new cultural landscape, nascent forms of imitation and upward mobility went hand in hand with a growing sense of individualism and materialism, and they were all considered, at least by many in society, to be socially proper and morally unobjectionable. To return to Sahlin once more, we may conclude that this was indeed an era characterized by the insatiable material and bodily needs of people—needs that were no longer perceived to be an integral part of people’s misery or bondage in this world. These needs were now the foundation of economic prosperity. More than ever before, ‘man [had] bec[o]me the pleasure-pain machine’ with never-ending demand for more drugs and consumer goods that drove society to a ‘wonderland’ that was to be the modern world.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ Sahlin, ‘Cosmologies of Capitalism’, 439–440.