This talk uses gift-giving practices in early nineteenth-century Iran as a window onto statecraft, governance, and center-periphery relations in the early Qajar state (1785 — 1925). Gifts have a long history in the administrative and political history of Iran, the Persianate world, and broader Eurasia, but the pīshkish, a tributary gift-giving ceremony, held a central role in the politics and economy of Qajar Iran. It was part of the process of presenting Qajar rule as a continuation of previous Iranian royal dynasties. Nevertheless, pīshkish ceremonies also illustrated the challenges Qajar rulers faced in exerting power and control in the provinces. Gifts and honors to the Shī‘ī religious establishment, to broader society, and to foreign envoys were part of Qajar rulers’ strategy of presenting themselves as just and legitimate.

Assef Ashraf
Yale University
Assef Ashraf is a doctoral candidate in the Department of History at Yale University. His dissertation research focuses on the political and cultural history of nineteenth-century Qajar Iran. More broadly, he is interested in the history of comparative empires, travel literature, and gift economies. Assef is Assistant Managing Editor at Dissertation Reviews, where he also serves as field editor of the Iran and Persian Studies series.

Friday, December 5, 12:00 - 1:30 pm
Luce 202, 34 Hillhouse Ave.
Light lunch will be provided

Sponsored by the Yale Program in Iranian Studies and the Council on Middle East Studies
Funded by a USDE Title VI grant and the Edward J. and Dorothy Clark Kempf Fund at The MacMillan Center