Word and Image in Persian Painting

After its beginnings in late 10th-century Central Asia, the Persian poetic tradition flourished in Central Asia, Iran, Iraq, Anatolia and the northern territories of India for 1,000 years. It dominated the high culture of urban centers and was pursued by professionals and amateurs of all social ranks. This body of literature conformed strictly to a highly regulated set of norms. To participate in this tradition at its most accomplished level—whether as author or audience member—required the complete immersion in a history of literary production and performance. Persian poetry is highly intertextual, a corpus of tropes and topoi that were used by poets with full knowledge of precedent. Newness was achieved by surpassing a prior performance through the prefection of an image or a conceit. Hence, Nizami writes in his *Haft paikar* (Seven portraits) of 1197:

> I searched through books both fine and rare for what would free the heart from care. Whatever chronicles might say of kings, that in books chosen lay, An earlier poet of keenest mind, had ordered all in verse refined. From it some ruby chips remained, shards, from which others something feigned. I, from those fragments, jeweler-wise, this precious treasure cut to size, So that the experts who assay all efforts, this most worthy weigh. That which was left by him half-said I say; the half-pierced pearl I thread.

From the late 1200s onward, manuscripts of Persian poetry and prose, the latter frequently rhymed and studded with choice poems, constituted a key form of courtly artistic production in urban centers such as Baghdad, Bukhara, Herat, Tabriz, Samarqand, and Shiraz. It was incumbent upon rulers and princes to foster the literary arts for it secured their good repute in their lifetime and after their death—this was poetry’s “double treasure,” in the words of al-Ghazali. Selected texts of the Persian literary tradition that were frequently illustrated constitute the focus of the seminar, including Firdawsi’s *Shahnama* (Book of kings), Nizami’s *Khamsa* (Quintet), Amir Khusraw Dihlawi’s *Khamsa*, Abu al-Ma’ali Nasrallah Munshi’s *Kalila wa Dimna* (Kalila and Dimna), and Abd al-Rahman Jami’s *Haft awrang* (Seven thrones), made at the Mongol Ilkhanid, Inju, Timurid, Turkman, Safavid, Mughal, and Ottoman courts over the 1300s, 1400s, and 1500s.

Study of word and image in the book—as a portable and self-contained site for reading and seeing—did not begin in earnest until the 1970s, perhaps as a reaction to the purely visual response to paintings by generations of scholars in the 1900s who were unable to read the Persian texts or who had no interest in them. An emphasis on the illustrative purpose of paintings in books led to word and image
studies that explored the development of pictorial cycles for commonly illustrated texts, embracing models from the fields of Byzantine and Medieval art history, and the iconographic formulas adopted by painters to depict their narratives. Though these approaches and others since are admirable for their serious engagement with text, much work remains to be done, for example, in exploring less literal explorations of word and image and in addressing the curious and persistent disconnect between the scholarship advanced by historians of art and historians of literature.

The modest objectives of the seminar include introducing key texts from the Persian literary tradition, developing an understanding of their literary forms, structure and themes (from the epic to the lyrical romance and mystical tract), and thinking about the various ways in which paintings operate in relation to text and vice versa as well as in relation to a history of painting. The weekly readings highlight a number of approaches and methodological perspectives taken by scholars to the study of word and image in Persian manuscripts with the goal of opening up new directions for future research.
Weekly Meetings and Readings

February 5  Introduction:  Word and Image:  Approaches to their Study

February 12  A Short History of Persian Painting

Readings:
Sheila Blair, “The Development of the Illustrated Book in Iran”
Lisa Golombek, “Toward a Classification of Islamic Painting”
Oleg Grabar, “Toward an Aesthetic of Persian Painting”
Marianna Shreve Simpson, “Islamic Painting and History”
Thomas W. Lentz, “Pictures for the Islamic Book:  Persian and Indian Painting in the Vever Collection”

Optional:
Sheila R. Canby, Persian Painting
Oleg Grabar, Mostly Miniatures:  An Introduction to Persian Painting
Wheeler M. Thackston, A Millennium of Classical Persian Poetry:  A Guide to the Reading and Understanding of Persian Poetry from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century

February 19  Shahnama of Abu al-Qasim Firdawsi:  Epic Poetry

Readings:
Jerome W. Clinton, “Ferdowsi and the Illustration of the Shahnameh”
________.  In The Dragon’s Claws:  The Story of Rostam and Esfandiyar From the Persian Book of Kings
________.  The Tragedy of Sohrab and Rostam
Abu Al-Qasim Firdawsi, Shahnameh:  The Persian Book of Kings, trans. Dick Davis

Optional:
Visit Shahnama project website @
http://shahnama.caret.cam.ac.uk/shahnama/faces/user/index

February 26  Shahnama:  Mongol Ilkhanid and Inju Manuscripts

Readings:
Oleg Grabar and Sheila Blair, Epic Images and Contemporary History
Marianna Shreve Simpson, *The Earliest Shahnama Manuscripts*

Marianna Shreve Simpson, “A Reconstruction and Preliminary Account of the 1341 Shahnama, with Some Further Thoughts on Early Shahnama Illustration”


**Optional:**
Ada Adamova, *Miniatyur, Rukopisi, Poemy Shakhname 1333 Goda*

______. “The St. Petersburg Illustrated Shahnama of 733 Hijra (1333 AD) and the Injuid School of Painting”

**March 4**

**Shahnama: Shah Tahmasp’s Manuscript**

**Readings:**
Robert Hillenbrand, “The Iconography of the Shahnama-yi Shahi”
Julie Scott Meisami, “The Shah-name as Mirror for Princes: A Study in Reception”
Eleanor G. Sims, “The Illustrated Manuscripts of Firdausi’s Shahnama Commissioned by Princes of the Houses of Timur”

**Optional:**
Priscilla Soucek, review of *The Houghton Shahnama* by Martin B. Dickson and Stuart Cary Welch

**March 11**

**Firdawsi’s Shahnama Translated and Adapted**

**Readings:**
Serpil Bagci, “From Translated Word to Translated Image: The Illustrated Sehname-i Turki Copies”
Will Kwiatkowski, *The Eckstein Shahnama: An Ottoman Book of Kings*

**March 22–30**

**Spring Break**

**March 18**

**Khamsa of Nizami Ganjavi**

**Readings:**
Julie Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*
Peter Chelkowski, ed., *Mirror of the Invisible World: Tales from the Khamsah of Nizami*

April 1

**Khamsa of Amir Khusraw Dihlavi**

**Readings:**
Barbara Brend, “Akbar’s ‘Khamsah’ of Amir Khusrau Dihlavi: A Reconstruction of the Cycle of Illustration”
_______. *The Emperor Akbar’s Khamsa of Nizami*
_______. *Perspectives on Persian Painting: Illustrations to Amir Khusrau’s Khamsah*

April 8

**Kalila wa Dimna of Abu al-Ma‘ali Nasrallah Munshi**

**Readings:**
Jill Sanchia Cowen, *Kalila wa Dimna: An Animal Allegory of the Mongol Court*
Ernst J. Grube, ed., *A Mirror for Princes from India: Illustrated versions of the Kalilah wa Dimna, Anvar-i Suhayli, Iyar-i Danish, and Humayun Nameh*
Bernard O’Kane, *Early Persian Painting: Kalila wa Dimna Manuscripts of the Late Fourteenth Century*

April 15

**Haft Awrang of Abd al-Rahman Jami**

**Readings:**
Marianna Shreve Simpson, *Sultan Ibrahim Mirza’s Haft Awrang*
_______. “The Making of Manuscripts and the Workings of the Kitabkhana in Safavid Iran”
_______. “The Production and Patronage of the Haft Aurang by Jami in the Freer Gallery of Art”

April 22  Student Presentations

April 29  Student Presentations

May 6  Student Presentations

May 13  Research paper due
WEB SITES ON SHAHNAMA

http://shahnama.caret.cam.ac.uk/shahnama/faces/user/index

http://www.princeton.edu/~shahnama/

Princeton website includes scans of Warner and Warner translation of *Shahnama*.

CATALOGUES AND REFERENCE WORKS


Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1983.


PERSIAN LITERATURE: PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES

** For biographies of poets and literary terminology, see Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd ed.: and Encyclopaedia Iranica. Both are on open reserve in the Fine Art Library reading room.


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Nizami Aruzi Samarqandi. *Chahar Maqala. The Four Discourses of Nidhami-i*


**PRIMARY TEXTS ON PAINTING AND CALLIGRAPHY**


**SECONDARY SOURCES**

**A. GENERAL STUDIES ON THE ART OF THE BOOK AND PERSIANATE PAINTING**


Azarpay, G. *Sogdian Painting: The Pictorial Epic in Oriental Art*. Berkeley:


______. *Les peintures des manuscrits Safavis de 1502 à 1587*. Paris: Paul
Geuthner, 1959.


B. MONOGRAPHS/ARTICLES: MANUSCRIPTS AND ARTISTS


______. “Rewriting the History of the Great Mongol Shahnama.” In *Shahnama:...


———. “A 14th-Century Khamseh of Nizami from Western Iran with Early Ottoman Illustrations.” Islamic Art 5 (2001): 133–66.


Lentz, Thomas W. “Painting at Herat under Baysunghur ibn Shah Rukh.” Ph.D.


______. *Miniatures from the Period of Timur in a MS of the Poems of Sultan Ahmad Jalayr*. Vienna: printed for the author, 1926.


______. *Early Persian Painting: Kalila wa Dimna Manuscripts of the Late*


______. “The Ann Arbor *Shahnama* and Its Importance.” In *Persian Painting*


**C. THEMATIC STUDIES**


Nasr, Sayyed Hossein. “‘The World of Imagination’ and the Concept of Space in the Persian Miniature.” *Islamic Quarterly* (**): 129–34.


D. WORKSHOP


