

# Attention!

This is a representative syllabus. The syllabus for the course you are enrolled in will likely be different.

Please refer to your instructor's syllabus for more information on specific requirements for a given semester.

## Introduction to Persian Epic

Instructor:

Office Hours:

Office:

Email:

No laptops, phones, or other mobile devices may be used in class.

This course is about the Persian Book of Kings, *Shahnameh*, of the Persian poet Abulqasim Firdawsi. The Persian Book of Kings combines mythical themes and historical narratives of Iran into a mytho-historical narrative, which has served as a source of national and imperial consciousness over centuries. At the same time, it is considered one of the finest specimen of Classical Persian literature and one of the world's great epic tragedies. It has had an immense presence in the historical memory and political culture of various societies from Medieval to Modern, in Iran, India, Central Asia, and the Ottoman Empire. Yet a third aspect of this monumental piece of world literature is its presence in popular story telling tradition and mixing with folk tales. As such, a millennium after its composition, it remains fresh and rife in cultural circles. We will pursue all of those lines in this course, as a comprehensive introduction to the text and tradition. Specifically, we will discuss the following in detail:

- The creation of *Shahname* in its historical context
- The myth and the imperial image in the *Shahname*
- *Shahname* as a cornerstone of “Iranian” identity.

### COURSE MATERIAL:

- *Shahname* is available in English translation. The translation of Shahname by Dick Davis is required reading for this course. Every week passages of the translation will be assigned.

- Other readings (book chapters, articles or encyclopedia entries) will be posted weekly, and categorized as required reading or suggested reading. The student must have done the reading for a particular session prior to the meeting and come prepared. Bring copies of the assigned reading to class on paper, as they will be consulted during the lectures and quoted.

#### CLASS PARTICIPATION and PRESENTATION:

- Be sure to do the required readings before the meeting. Students are expected to engage in class discussions actively. Reading from the suggested readings will help you get a fuller grasp of the discussion, and enrich the experience of class participation for everybody. All participants in the class are expected to engage in class discussions actively. If you don't feel comfortable making a comment at first, you can always ask a question. You are expected to come to class ready to enter a conversation on the topic, and will be graded accordingly. If you find it difficult to engage in class discussions talk to me outside the class and we will find ways to include everybody in class conversations.
- There will be short writing assignments, as well as one short presentation by each student. While the writing questions will be assigned by the instructor and posted on Carmen, the topics for the presentation is chosen by student after consultation with the instructor.
- Each student must write a final paper on a topic of choice after consultation with the instructor. The topic of the final paper may be related to your in-class presentation. In fact you should treat the in-class presentation as a chance to engage with a topic for your final paper so that you can write a better paper. It is important to present the material logically and coherently, show all work, and give all credit due with proper citation. This is your chance to really learn a lot about a specific topic of your choice within the purview of this class – make the most of it.

#### GRADING:

- Attending class, and actively participating in class discussions accounts for 20% of your overall grade
- Writing assignments (30%)
- The in-class presentation (10%)
- Final paper (40%)

Bibliography:

Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh, the Persian Book of Kings*, trans. R. Davis, Penguin Classics, New York, 2007.

- Arberry, A.J., *Classical Persian Literature*, Allen and Unwin Press, 1958.
- Davidson, O. *Poet and Hero in the Persian Book of Kings*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 1994.
- Davis, R. *Epic and Sedition: A Case of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh*, Mage Publishers, Washington, DC, 1992, paperback, 2006.
- Schimmel, Annemarie, *A Two-colored Brocade*, The University of North Carolina Press, 1992.
- Shahbazi, S. *Ferdowsi: A Critical Biography*, Mazada Pub., Costa Mesa, CA, 1991, paperback 2010.

Various articles from:

- *The Rise of Islam, vol. 4, The Idea of Iran*, ed. Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis and Sarah Stewart, I. B. Tauris, London, 2009.
- *The Cambridge History of Iran, vol. 3 Part 2, The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanid Periods*, ed. E. Yarshater, Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- *The Cambridge History of Iran, vol. 4, The Period from the Arab Invasion to the Seljuqs*, ed. Richard N. Frye, Cambridge University Press, 1975. Available online through OSU Library.
- *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, Columbia University Center for Iranian Studies, New York, 2002-. Available online at [www.iranicaonline.org](http://www.iranicaonline.org).

Week 1. January 14<sup>th</sup>

Background to the *Shahname*, myth, memory, history

The historical memory of the Sasanids

Iran, Persia, Empire

Week 2. January 21<sup>st</sup>

Davis, tr. *Shahname*, pp. 1-8, Shahbazi, *Ferdowsi*, pp. 20-75,

Kayumarth and the story of creation.

*kin*, 'vengeance' and the cycle of justice.

Hushang and the story of Civilization

Week 3. January 28<sup>th</sup>

Davis, tr. *Shahname*, pp. 9-27, 1<sup>st</sup> written assignment due

Tahmures and the memory of the conquest,

creation, civilization, conquest

Jamshid and the cycle of Justice

Week 4. February 4<sup>th</sup>

Davis, tr. *Shahname*, pp. 28-62. 2<sup>nd</sup> written assignment due.

Zahak, temptation, “foreign” rule, Faridun and Kaveh

Faridun and his three sons, Iraj and Manuchehr

Week 5. February 11<sup>th</sup>

Davis, tr. *Shahname*, pp. 62-103.

Sam and Simorgh,

Zal and Rudabeh, Heroes in the *Shahname*,

Week 6. February 18<sup>th</sup>

Davis, tr. *Shahname*, pp. 104-151.

Rostam, the national hero Rakhsh and Rostam, Human and Animal

Rostam and Kaykavus, the demons of Mazandaran

Week 7. February 25<sup>th</sup>

Davis, tr. *Shahname*, pp. 152-214, 3<sup>rd</sup> written assignment due

The seven trails of Rostam

Rostam and Sohrab,

Week 8. March 4<sup>th</sup>

Davis, tr. *Shahname*, pp. 215-298, 4<sup>th</sup> written assignment due

Tragedy in the *Shahname*

The Legend of Siavash, The story of Forud, The story of Akvan Div

Week 9. March 11<sup>th</sup>

deadline to pick topics for final projects is Friday March 13<sup>th</sup>!

Rostam and Esfandiyar, the Death of Rostam

March 18<sup>th</sup> Happy Spring Break!

Week 10. March 25<sup>th</sup>

Davis, tr. *Shahname*, pp. 456-528, 5<sup>th</sup> written assignment due.

Alexander in the *Shahname*

Week 11. April 1<sup>st</sup>

Davis, tr. *Shahname*, pp. 529-831. Selected historical episodes

The Sasanids: History and Memory

Week 12. April 8<sup>th</sup>

Davis, tr. *Shahname*, pp. 529-831. Selected episodes.

The Sasanids: Memory and Marvel

Week 13. April 15<sup>th</sup>

In-class presentations of final projects

Week 14. April 22<sup>nd</sup>

In-class presentations of final projects