

Kamran Djam Biennial Lectures at SOAS (2022)

Centre for Iranian Studies,
SOAS, University of London



The Great Mongol *Shahnama*

Two Lectures by Professor Robert Hillenbrand FBA
University of St. Andrews

Monday 7 and Tuesday 8 November 2022

Djam Lecture Theatre, SOAS University of London

Kamran Djam Biennial Lecture Series at SOAS

In 2011 SOAS was awarded a gift of £2 million by the Fereydoun Djam Charitable Trust to promote Iranian studies. This generous endowment enables SOAS to build on its long and distinguished tradition of study into one of the world's oldest and richest cultures. As part of this initiative, SOAS has introduced new scholarships in Iranian studies as well as lecture series to promote diverse aspects of Iranian studies. These lectures are hosted by the Centre for Iranian Studies at SOAS and are named after Fereydoun's son, Kamran Djam, who predeceased his parents in 1989. We are delighted that the 2022 lectures will be given by Professor Robert Hillenbrand FBA.



Professor Robert Hillenbrand FBA is one of the leading British art historians who specialises in Persian art and Islamic art in general, with research interests spanning Islamic architecture, book painting, iconography and other arts with a particular focus on Iran and on Umayyad Syria. His more than 220 publications include prize-winning books on both Islamic architecture and on Persian painting.

Professor Robert Hillenbrand was educated at the universities of Cambridge and Oxford and taught at the Department of Fine Art, University of Edinburgh, from 1971. He was awarded a chair of Islamic art in 1989. Professor Hillenbrand retired from the University of Edinburgh in December 2007 but then taught at the University of St Andrews from 2013 until 2021. He is currently an Honorary Professorial Fellow in the Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies (IMES) at the University of Edinburgh and Emeritus Professor of Fine Art there, and Honorary Professor of Islamic Art at the School of Art History at the University of St. Andrews.

His travels have taken him throughout the Islamic world. He has held visiting professorships at Princeton, UCLA, Bamberg, Leiden, New York, Cairo, Dartmouth College and Groningen, and was Slade Professor of Art at Cambridge in 2008. His eleven books include *Imperial Images in Persian Painting*; the prize-winning *Islamic Architecture: Form, Function and Meaning*; *Islamic Art and Architecture*, *The Architecture of Ottoman Jerusalem*, *The Holy Ark of Isfahan*; and four volumes of collected articles. He has also co-authored, edited or co-edited a further fourteen books.

He has served on numerous editorial boards and was Islamic art adviser to the 36-volume *Macmillan Dictionary of Art*. He has also served on the Councils of the *British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem*, *British Research in the Levant*, and the *British Institute of Persian Studies* (Vice-President).

Both Professor Hillenbrand's lectures present much material not tackled at length in his recently published book on this manuscript, copies of which will be available at these lectures.

The Great Mongol *Shahnama*

The *Shahnama* or 'Book of Kings' is the unrivalled Persian national epic, consisting of more than 50,000 couplets, completed in around 1010 AD by Abul'Qasem Ferdowsi, one of the greatest poets of Iran. The *Shahnama*, one of the world's longest epic poems, narrates the mythical, and in some parts, the historical past of the Persian empire, from the beginning of time and the creation of the world, until the fall of the Sasanian empire in the mid 7th century. Over 500 illustrated manuscripts of this text, produced over the last seven centuries, have survived. These treasures include the Great Mongol *Shahnama*, probably produced in Tabriz, the Ilkhanid capital, in around 1320-1335. Many consider the Great Mongol *Shahnama* as the supreme example of the entire Iranian tradition of book illustration.

Monday 7 November: What Makes the Great Mongol *Shahnama* Great?

The lecture on what makes the Great Mongol *Shahnama* great will focus first on the contemporary context from which this manuscript sprang, identifying how its painters built on what their predecessors had achieved and on the work of their contemporary colleagues. The lecture will then examine such unprecedented innovations as the development of pictorial space, a hugely expanded range of emotional expression, and an exciting experiments in composition and format. To put it briefly, much more was happening on the page, and the lecture will try to explain the impact of these dramatic changes of approach.



Tuesday 8 November: What Problems Does the Great Mongol *Shahnama* Pose?

The lecture on the problems posed by the Great Mongol *Shahnama*, probably produced in Tabriz c.1320-1335, will open with a brief history of the manuscript in order to contextualise what follows. The body of the lecture will tackle five of the many problems posed by this challenging masterpiece. These revolve in turn around its multiple innovations, which owe much to its colossal size; the complexities of its production process; the unprecedented number of its illustrations; its patron; and its curiously limited legacy.

The Kamran Djam Biennial Lectures

Centre for Iranian Studies, SOAS

Date

First Lecture: Monday, 7 November 2022
5:30pm, followed by a reception at G3 at 7:00pm
Second Lecture: Tuesday, 8 November 2022
6:00 pm

Venue

Djam Lecture Theatre (DLT)
(DLT) Main Building
SOAS, University of London
Russell Square
London WC1H 0XG

Admission

Admission Free -All Welcome

Organised by

Centre for Iranian Studies, SOAS

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