

The Kamran Djam Annual Lectures
Centre for Iranian Studies,
SOAS, University of London



**The Perils of Persian Princesses:
Women and Medieval Persian Literature**

Lectures by Professor Dick Davis

Ohio State University

Friday 25 and Monday 28 October 2013

Kamran Djam Annual 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 an annual lecture series to promote diverse aspects of Iranian studies. The annual 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 to announce the second in this series of lectures which will be given by Professor Dick Davis.



Dick Davis is Professor Emeritus of Persian at Ohio State University, where he was chair of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures from 2002 to 2012. He is the recipient of numerous academic and literary awards, and has written scholarly works on both English and Persian literature, as well as publishing several volumes of his own poetry. He is probably best known for his translations from medieval Persian: these include *Attar's Conference of the Birds* (with Afkham Darbandi), *Borrowed Ware: Medieval Persian Epigrams*, *Ferdowsi's Shahnameh*, *Gorgani's Vis and Ramin*, and, most recently, *Faces of Love: Hafez and the Poets of Shiraz*. He has also translated one contemporary work, Iraj Pezeshkzad's comic novel, *My Uncle Napoleon*. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and has been called, by the *Times Literary Supplement*, "our finest translator from Persian".

The Perils of Persian Princesses: Women and Medieval Persian Literature

Friday 25 October: To Whom do you Beautifully Belong, or Whose Life is it Anyway? Women in Medieval Persian Poetry

The first talk will concentrate on the ways in which women are presented in medieval Persian poetry particularly, but not exclusively, in narrative poetry. A number of dichotomies become apparent when we examine the relevant material. For example, in the first (“legendary” / “mythological”) half of the *Shahnameh* women are presented very differently from the ways in which they are presented in the “historical” (post Alexander) half of the poem; similarly, if we compare the heroine of the 11th century romance, *Vis and Ramin*, with heroines of subsequent Persian romances, for example those by Nezami and Jami, we again see a clear difference in treatment – different qualities possessed by the heroines become praiseworthy, different qualities are condemned, and the question of the heroines’ own autonomy and personal agency undergoes major revision. The talk will also include brief discussions of two related issues: the ambiguous gender of the beloved in the Persian *ghazal* and the relative frequency with which female warriors turn up in medieval Persian narratives (in both verse and prose).

Monday 28 October: Those Who are Great do not Belittle what is Little: a Poet-Princess of 14th Century Shiraz

The second talk will be concerned with woman poets writing in Persian during the medieval period. Though mention will be made of poets who preceded her, most of the talk will be concerned with the personality and poetry of the 14th century Inju Princess Jahan Malek Khatun; hers is the only complete *divan* by a woman writing in Persian to have come down to us from before the 19th century, and it is therefore obviously of major importance. Jahan Khatun’s uncle, the ruler of Shiraz Shah Abu Eshaq, was Hafez’s major patron, as well as being a patron of other notable poets such as Kh’aju and Obayd-e Zakani, which meant that Jahan was living at the centre of one of the most splendid scenes of Persian poetic production. During Jahan Khatun’s lifetime her family lost power in Shiraz, and most of her immediate male relatives were killed; some of her poems reflect directly on the political upheavals of the time and place in which she lived, and also refer to her own precarious situation after the *coup d’etat*. Her work is thus of political and historical significance, apart from its intrinsic literary interest.

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Date

First Lecture: Friday, 25 October 2013

6.00pm followed by a reception at 7.30pm

Second Lecture: Monday, 28 October 2013

6.00pm – 7.30pm

Venue

Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre

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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