

The Art of the Islamic Book, 1250–1600

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The seminar focuses on the arts of the book in the central Islamic lands in the period between the Mongol invasions and the years immediately after the death of the Safavid ruler Shah Tahmasp (d. 1576). During this period, fine editions of books came to occupy a central place in the artistic culture of royal and sub-royal courts of Iran and Central Asia. After developing knowledge of the history of the arts of the book, its key literary texts and visual traditions, the seminar goes on to examine topics as a problem-oriented inquiry. Aspects of book production—materials, codicology, calligraphy, illumination, and painting—are studied through material and written sources (recipe books, technical treatises, and prefaces to albums).

Topics that we will consider include the organization of painting according to schools and styles; models of patronage (focusing on court-sponsored manuscripts and the kitabkhana “workshop”); the development of techniques and the changing aesthetics of the book; the creation of visual idioms; artistic transmission; and word and image. Objects from the Harvard University Art Museums will be used in the classroom.

Week 1: **The Historical Context**

- Barbara Brend, *Islamic Art*, introduction and chapters 5 and 6.

Week 2: **The Art of the Book, ca 1250-1400**

- Johannes Pedersen, *The Arabic Book*, chapters 1–6.
- Sheila Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, *The Art and Architecture of Islam, 1250–1800*, chapters 3.
- Basil Gray, ed., *The Arts of the Book in Central Asia 14th–16th Centuries*, introduction, chapters 4.

Week 3: **The Art of the Book, ca 1400-1600**

- Basil Gray, ed., *The Arts of the Book in Central Asia 14th–16th Centuries*, introduction, chapters 5–7.
- R. W. Ferrier, ed., *The Arts of Persia*, chaps. 13 and 15 (E. Sims and E. Grube, “Painting” and B. Brend, “The Arts of the Book”).

Week 4: **The Codex: Materials, Methods, and Tools of the Trade**

- Gulnar K. Bosch, *Islamic Bindings and Bookmaking*, pp. 24–74.
- Yves Porter, *Painters, paintings, and books*, chaps. 2 and 4.
- Jonathan M. Bloom, *Paper Before Print*, chapters 1 and 2.
- Simi Nishapuri, “Treatise on Calligraphic Arts,” trans. Thackston.

Week 5: **The Design and Visual Idioms of Books**

- Thomas Lentz and Glenn Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, chapters 2 and 3.
- Porter, *Painters, Paintings, and Books*, chapter 3.
- David J. Roxburgh, *Persian Drawing, ca. 1400–1450: Materials and Creative Procedures*.

Week 6: **The Whole Book: Structures and Aesthetics**

- Sheila Blair, “The Development of the Illustrated Book in Iran.”
- Oleg Grabar, “Persian Miniatures: Illustrations or Paintings.”
- Lisa Golombek, “Toward a Classification of Islamic Painting.”
- Priscilla Soucek, “The Manuscripts of Iskandar Sultan: Structure and Content.”

Week 7: **The Workshop: Models for Production and Patronage**

- Sheila S. Blair, *A Compendium of Chronicles*, introduction, chapters 1–4, and appendix 1.
- Anonymous, “Arzadasht” [Progress Report, ca. 1430], in Wheeler Thackston, trans., *Album Prefaces and Other Documents on the History of Calligraphers and Painters*, pp. 43–46.
- Porter, *Painters, Paintings, and Books*, chapter 9.
- Marianna Shreve Simpson, “The Making of Manuscripts and the Workings of the Kitab-khana in Safavid Iran.”

Week 8: **Nizami's Khamsa (Quintet): Word and Image**

- Peter Chelkowski, “The Seven Princesses,” in *Mirror of the Invisible World*, ed. Peter Chelkowski, pp. 69–115.
- Nizami Ganjavi, *The Haft Paykar: A Medieval Persian Romance*, trans. Meisami, pp. 51–53, 97–132.
- Johann Christoph Bürgel, “Love on Sight of Pictures,” in Bürgel, *Feather of Simurgh*, pp. 119–37

Week 9: **Sa'di's Bustan (Orchard): The Artist Bihzad**

- Thomas W. Lentz, “Changing Worlds: Bihzad and the New Painting,” in *Persian Masters: Five Centuries of Painting*, ed. Sheila R. Canby, pp. 39–54.
- Ebadollah Bahari, *Bihzad, Master of Persian Painting*, intro. and chapter 4.
- David Roxburgh, “Kamal al-Din Bihzad and Authorship in Persian Painting.”

Week 10: **Firdawsi's Shahnama (Book of Kings): Ideology in the Great Mongol Shahnama and Shah Tahmasp's Shahnama**

- Oleg Grabar and Sheila Blair, *Epic Images and Contemporary History*, pp. 1–55.
- Robert Hillenbrand, “The Iconography of the Shah-nama-yi Shahi.”
- Stuart Cary Welch, *A King's Book of Kings*, pp. 15–76.

Week 11: The Value of Written Sources for the Study of the Art of the Book, Part 1

- Thackston, *Album Prefaces and Other Documents on the History of Calligraphers and Painters*, pp. 4–17 and 18–21 (prefaces by Dust Muhammad and Malik Daylami), and “Miscellaneous Documents,” p. 50 and p. 51.

Week 12: The Value of Written Sources for the Study of the Art of the Book, Part 2

- Qazi Ahmad b. Mir Munshi, *Calligraphers and Painters*, translated by V. Minorsky.

Week 13: Conclusion: Assessing Approaches to the Art of the Book

- Glenn Lowry and Susan Nemazee, “Persian and Indian Painting.”
- David Roxburgh, “The Study of Painting and the Arts of the Book.”
- Marianna Shreve Simpson, “Islamic Painting and History.”