



AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF IRANIAN STUDIES

Annual Newsletter

2013

This year witnessed a political breakthrough in US-Iran relations following the Iranian presidential election and leading to fruitful discussions regarding the nuclear negotiations and sanctions. When members of the new Iranian administration were in New York for the United Nations General Assembly in September, AIrS had the honor of meeting with HE Mohammad-Ali Najafi, Vice President and Head of the Iranian Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization (ICHHTO). Discussions centered on the importance of resuming active scholarly exchanges between the US and Iran, with special emphasis on opportunities for Persian language study in Iran. Present at these discussions were senior officials from the Iranian Interests Section in Washington, DC, who have been of long-standing and invaluable counsel to AIrS concerning the visa application process. At the invitation of Dr. Najafi, AIrS has submitted a Two-Year Plan to ICHHTO proposing fellowship programs and activities that AIrS is prepared to oversee, given adequate funding for such. As a result of continuing Federal cutbacks, particularly from sequestration, AIrS's budget is suffering major shortfalls and its ability to initiate new programs will depend on its ability to raise the requisite funds. The Two-Year Plan has already met with positive response in Tehran and AIrS will pursue its possible implementation in the coming year. To this end, AIrS seeks potential donors who would like to support its decades-long mission of promoting the interdisciplinary study of Iran and fostering person-to-person exchanges. AIrS is determined to remain a viable advocate for Iranian Studies and grasp the historic opportunity for re-engagement that now presents itself.

Erica Ehrenberg
Executive Director

NEW INSTITUTIONAL MEMBER AND TRUSTEES

The University of Oklahoma joined AIrS as a new Institutional Member and appointed to the AIrS board Dr. Afshin Marashi, Associate Professor, Department of International and Area Studies, and Farzaneh Family Chair, Iranian Studies, Center for Middle Eastern Studies.

After nearly a decade as the Institutional Trustee for Cornell University, Dr. David Owen retired from his position at Cornell and from the AIrS Board, which thanks him for his dedication. Newly appointed by Cornell to serve as its trustee on AIrS's board is Dr. Iago Gocheleishvili, Department of Near Eastern Studies.

OFFICERS OF AIrS

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Clinical Professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies
Department of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies
New York University

FELLOWS

❖ *Pre-doctoral Fellowships*

- ♦ For travel to Tashkent, Uzbekistan to research at the al-Biruni Institute of Oriental Studies in support of an Indiana University dissertation examining the contrasting types of spiritual legitimacy claimed from the Khurasanian Sufi saint Ahmad-i Jām (1049-1141).
- ♦ For research in the Iran-Iraq War archives at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, Netherlands, in support of a New York University dissertation on the role of Basij media makers and the ways they imagine engendering a new generation of followers for the Islamic Republic.

SPONSORED PROJECTS

❖ *Conference*

- ♦ AIIRs supported the presence of American graduate students and Iranian scholars at the biennial conference of the Association for the Study of Persianate Societies (ASPS) held in Sarajevo, September 2-6, 2013, and creating a unique opportunity for a cohort of American students to meet Iranian colleagues. The conference was attended by almost 250 scholars from over 20 countries, including colleagues from the wider Persianate world of Armenia, Georgia, Tajikistan, India and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Among other institutional partners of the conference was the Gazi Husrev Beg Library, which presented an exhibition of early modern Persian manuscripts. The Bosniac Institute also showcased a collection of its rare Persian manuscripts.

❖ *Workshop/Lectures*

♦ Workshop at Columbia University entitled “Islam in the Columbia Curriculum, 1886-2012: From Oriental Languages to Area Studies and Religious Studies,” held on January 31, 2013. The one-day conference addressed the history of Islamic Studies in North America in general and at Columbia University in particular, and explored how the emphasis on Social Studies transformed Near Eastern Studies after 1945. It included a survey of the development of Area Studies and papers about the study of Islam in the African-American community and in Persianate societies, respectively. The day concluded with a roundtable on Islamic and Global Studies in the twenty-first century.

♦ Lecture delivered on November 19, 2013, at Columbia University’s Seminar on Religion and Writing by M. Rahim Shayegan, Associate Professor of Iranian and Director of Iranian Studies, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, UCLA. The lecture, entitled “The King and his Audience: On the Composition and Reception of Royal Inscriptions in Ancient Iran and the Iranian World” addressed Achaemenid and Sasanian, epigraphy (6th century BCE – 3rd to 4th century CE), as well as of the royal inscriptions of the Irano-Hellenistic kingdom of Commagene (1st century BCE) and the dialectics at play between the inscriptions’ compositional strategies and the target audiences.

♦ Lecture at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, delivered on December 7, 2013 by Dr. Sheila Blair of Boston University, entitled “Text and Image in Persian Art.” This illustrated lecture investigated one example of interplay between the verbal and visual: the painting of "Humay and Humayun Celebrating the Consummation of their Marriage" (from the famous copy of Khwaju Kermani's poems made at Baghdad in 1396), showing how its complex metaphors and allusions have continued to delight audiences from the 14th century up to the present day.

❖ *Public Arts Programs*

♦ Again this year, AIIrS supported the New York-based Persian Arts Festival, which holds an annual Nowruz public arts event. Last year, this took the form of a reading of a new theater script written by an Iranian-American playwright. This year, for the 7th Annual Festival, the arts offering was a concert of contemporary interpretations of Persian music, as rendered by a number of top-tier Persian fusion bands, blending Persian poetry with jazz and paying homage to the pop/funk music of 1960s/70s Iran.

♦ A grant to The Metropolitan Museum of Art is underwriting planning for the upcoming exhibition on “The Great Age of the Seljuqs,” which will be a major international loan exhibit focusing on the Seljuqs who ruled Iran and Anatolia in the 11th-13th centuries. During the Seljuq reign, prosperity led to the expansion of the Iranian middle class, which in turn resulted in the patronage of the arts and stimulated a market for luxury goods. The grant supports preparations for the exhibition and catalogue, and consultations with external scholars in the field. The exhibit will create a more nuanced understanding of the history of Iran.

♦ At the Asia Society in New York, AIIrS supported various educational aspects of their Fall 2013 exhibition “Iran Modern.” The exhibition focused on Iranian art produced from 1950 through 1979, and was the first major international loan exhibition in New York on the subject, comprising painting, sculpture, photography and works on paper. The artworks, by noteworthy Iranian artists of the three decades at hand, provided a new perspective on Iranian culture and history. Since the Iranian Revolution and until recently, little scholarly or public attention was paid to Iranian art. The exhibit challenged long-held assumptions that the concept of modernity pertains only to western culture of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and demonstrated that modernism in art is more globally interconnected than previously acknowledged. Among the public programs presented in conjunction with the exhibit and sponsored by AIIrS were:

*A curator’s talk, September 10, 2013, delivered by Fereshteh Daftari, giving an overview of the major works displayed in the exhibit.

*The Shiraz Arts Festival: A Global Vision Revisited, October 5, 2013, a full-day symposium on the Shiraz Arts Festival. The Festival positioned Iran as a global leader in the arts and its programming reflected the avant-garde tastes of the times. The symposium reconsidered the Festival – a major arts event that took place from 1967-1977 when Iran was receptive to international artistic and cultural influences – as an entry to understanding the global aspirations of Iran within the international art world. Speakers included artists and scholars – both Iranian and non-Iranian – who participated in or have studied the Festival.

*Iran's Art World: 1960s–1970s, October 22, 2013. A panel of artists and art historians addressed the art world of Iran in the 1960s and '70s.

*Iran: Art and Discourse, October 26, 2013. This symposium on the production, distribution and circulation of visual art in Iran presented panels on curating, critics and arts organizations, and examined political economies of contemporary art within Iran.

*Iranian New Wave 1960s-1970s. November 2013. Film series dedicated to Iranian New Wave films of the 1960s and '70s when exposure to international films inspired a group of young Iranian filmmakers to break away from commercial cinema and express a uniquely Iranian national identity through film, acting as the conscience of society and projecting societal issues on screen.

UPCOMING CONFERENCES, 2014

❖ “After the Persianate: Cultural Heritage and National Transformation in Modern Iran and India,” March 7-8, 2014, Norman, Oklahoma
Convened by the University of Oklahoma College of International Studies, Iranian Studies Program.

Conference organizer: Afshin Marashi, Farzaneh Family Associate Professor of Iranian Studies, Department of International and Area Studies, University of Oklahoma; AIrS Institutional Trustee for University of Oklahoma.

https://cim.ou.edu/content/cis/sponsored_programs/iranian-studies-program/after-the-persianate.html

❖ Fourteenth International Qajar Studies Association (IQSA) Conference: “Literature and Writing in Qajar Iran,” May 30-31, 2014, Department of Iranian Studies, University of Bamberg, Bamberg, Germany.

Convened by Otto-Friedrich Universitaet, Bamberg, Germany and jointly organized by the International Qajar Studies Association (IQSA) and the Iranistik Institute of the Otto-Friedrich University of Bamberg.

Conference Chair: Houchang Chehabi, Professor of International Relations and History, Department of International Relations, Boston University; AIrS Institutional Trustee for Boston University

<http://www.qajarstudies.org/IQSAEvents.html>

❖ Tenth Biennial Iranian Studies Conference, August 6-10, 2014, Montréal, Québec, Canada, Hilton Bonaventure Hotel

Convened by the International Society for Iranian Studies

<http://iranianstudies.com/conferences/2014/information>

❖ American Schools of Oriental Research 2014 Annual Meeting, November 19-22, 2014, The Westin San Diego, San Diego, CA

"Recent Archaeological Work in Iran"

Session co-chairs: Abbas Alizadeh (Oriental Institute) and John Alden (University of Michigan)

<http://www.asor.org/am/2014/hotel-city.html>

❖ Middle East Studies Association 48th Annual Meeting, November 22-25, 2014, Marriott Wardman Park Hotel, Washington DC.

<http://www.mesa.arizona.edu/annual-meeting/>

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