

Persian 374
Introduction to Persian Epic
Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures

Schedule: Instructor/email: Prof. Dick Davis(.77)
Location: Office/phone: 300G Hagerty Hall; 292-5643
Call Number: Office hours:

Course description: An introduction, in English, to *The Shahnameh* of AbolQasem Ferdowsi, the masterpiece of Persian epic.

Prereq: English 110 or equiv.

Rationale: Students in the course will read, in English translation, the main narratives of *The Shahnameh* of AbolQasem Ferdowsi. This work has been called the single most important masterpiece of Persian literature. Written in the last decades of the 10th century CE and the early years of the 11th century, this major epic covers the history of Iran (Persia) from the creation of the world to the Arab conquest of the country in the mid 7th century, a conquest which ended imperial Persian power in Western Asia and brought the then new religion of Islam to the country. Ferdowsi's retelling of the ancient pre-Islamic mythology is our main source for this fascinating material, and the later sections of his work give us a colorful romanticized history of the last pre-Islamic dynasty to rule in Iran.

Although there are other epics in Persian besides Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, just as there are other epics in Greek besides Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, they are considered so minor by comparison that the term "Persian Epic" is taken as referring to "Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*," just as the term "Greek epic" is taken as referring to Homer's works. Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* represents the fullest and highest expression of Persian epic as a genre, just as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* epitomize the essential features of Greek epic as a genre.

This course is intended to fulfill the GEC Category 2: Breadth: Section C. Arts and Humanities, (1) Literature

2. Breadth: C. Arts and Humanities

Goals:

Students evaluate significant writing and works of art. Such studies develop capacities for aesthetic and historical response and judgment; interpretation and evaluation; critical listening, reading, seeing, thinking, and writing; and experiencing the arts and reflecting on that experience.

Expected Learning Outcomes:

1. Students develop abilities to be informed observers of, or active participants in, the visual, spatial, performing, spoken, or literary arts.
2. Students develop an understanding of the foundations of human beliefs, the nature of reality, and the norms that guide human behavior.
3. Students examine and interpret how the human condition and human values are explored through works of art and humanistic writings.

(1) Literature Expected Learning Outcomes:

1. Students learn to analyze, appreciate, and interpret significant literary works.
2. Through reading, discussing, and writing about literature, students learn to understand and evaluate the personal and social values of their own and other cultures.

Expected Learning Outcomes for Persian 374:

In light of the course rationale given above, a student who successfully completes the course will have acquired a thorough knowledge of the main narratives of the *Shahnameh*, as well as being aware of the cultural and historical context from which these narratives sprang. The student will have gained familiarity with one of the most important non-religious Middle Eastern texts, and in this way will also have achieved considerable insight into sources of contemporary Iranian cultural self-awareness.

Required text (available at SBX): AbolQasem Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh: the Persian Book of Kings*, translated by Dick Davis, Penguin Classics, 2007.

Students should read the readings *before* the first class of the week for which they are assigned, so that they will be able to participate in class discussions on the reading, and in any quizzes that may be given. An exception will be made for the first week; for the classes of this week students will not be expected to have completed the assigned readings before the beginning of class.

Student evaluation

Class participation will be encouraged throughout the course. Quizzes will be given every other week. There will also be a midterm exam and a final exam, both of which will be given in a multiple-essay format.

Class participation	15%
Quizzes	20%
Midterm Exam	30%
Final Exam	35%

Grading scale:

A (94-100) A- (90-93) B+ (87-89) B (83-86) B- (80-82) C+ (77-79) C (73-76) C- (70-72) D+ (67-69) D (60-66) E (below 60)

SYLLABUS

Week 1. Introduction. Ferdowsi's world and times; his sources. The divisions of the poem (mythological, legendary, historical). Its major themes. About this translation.

Readings: *Shahnameh*, pp.xiii –xxxvii.

Week 2. The mythological *Shahnameh*.

Readings: *Shahnameh*, pp. 1 – 103.

Week 3. The legendary *Shahnameh*. The early tales of Rostam.

Readings: *Shahnameh*, pp.105 - 186.

Week 4. The legendary *Shahnameh* continued. “Fathers and Sons”.

Readings: *Shahnameh*, pp. 187 – 279.

Week 5. The legendary *Shahnameh* continued. “Fathers and Sons” continued.

Readings: *Shahnameh*, pp. 347 - 439.

Week 6. The legendary *Shahnameh* continued. The Akvan Div; Bizhan and Manizheh.

Readings: *Shahnameh*, pp. 299 - 345.

MIDTERM

Week 7. The historical *Shahnameh*. Darab, Dara, and Eskandar.

Readings: *Shahnameh*, pp.441. – 528.

Week 8. The historical *Shahnameh* continued. The Ashkanians, Ardeshir.

Readings: *Shahnameh*, pp.529 – 576. Bahram Gur, *Shahnameh*, pp.622-684.

Week 9, The historical *Shahnameh* continued. Bahram Chubineh, *Shahnameh* pp.727- 797. The last stories and the Arab Conquest.

Readings: *Shahnameh*, pp. 826 – 854.

Week 10. *The Shahnameh* and the visual culture of Iran. Review.

Academic Misconduct Policy:

It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term “academic misconduct” includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the site of the Committee on Academic Misconduct at <http://oaa.osu.edu/coam/home.html>).

Disability Services Policy:

Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office for Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated, and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office for Disability Services is located in 150 Pomerene Hall, 1760 Neil Avenue; telephone 292-3307, TDD 292-0901; <http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu>.