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**Witches and demons, kings and prophets:
The *Shāhnāma* and its afterlife
in the Persian manuscript tradition**

2, 6, 10, 13 et 16 novembre 2026
Auditorium Georges Dumézil
Inalco, 2 rue de Lille, Paris

Résumés

Lundi, 2 novembre 2026, 17-19h

What's in a *Shāhnāma* manuscript? Reflections on the *Shāhnāma* manuscript tradition via the 15th -century *Shāhnāma* manuscript copy preserved in Leiden University Library

A comprehensive inventory of *Shāhnāma* manuscripts preserved to this day is impossible to make, even though the Cambridge *Shāhnāma* Project has given us quite some insight into the scope and nature of illustrated *Shāhnāma* manuscripts. On the basis of the findings of this and other projects related to the study of the *Shāhnāma* manuscript tradition, it can be concluded that each *Shāhnāma* manuscript is unique, and may contain hidden treasures that cannot be found in other manuscripts: at the same time, each manuscript also closely follows previous models. In this lecture, some notable features of the *Shāhnāma* as transmitted through manuscripts will be discussed by taking a closer look at what may seem to be at first sight an “ordinary” *Shāhnāma* manuscript, namely the 15th-century Timurid manuscript copy Or. 494, the only illustrated *Shāhnāma* copy kept in the manuscript collection of Leiden University Library, and one of the manuscripts used by the much lamented Djalal Khaleghi Motlagh for his edition of the *Shāhnāma*.

Vendredi, 6 novembre 2026, 17-19h

Revisiting the *Shāhnāma* demons: narrative and pictorial patterns regarding the *dīv* in the *Shāhnāma* manuscript tradition

Demons (*dīvs*) in various guises and roles play an important role in the *Shāhnāma*, especially in the episodes dealing with the adventures of the hero Rustam. The interaction between the White Dīv and Rustam, the finale of the Rustam's Seven Trials, is one of the most famous stories in the *Shāhnāma*. The pictorial cycle of illustrated *Shāhnāma* manuscripts almost invariably includes a painting of the recognizable scene in which Rustam slays the White Dīv in order to free the reckless King Kāvus. In this lecture, the role and depiction of demons in the *Shāhnāma* and in the *Shāhnāma* manuscript tradition will be discussed in connection to the appearance of demons and their offspring in so-called secondary or later epics, specifically as featured in the story on the son of the White Dīv, Shabrang, composed as a sequel to the *Haft Khvān* or Seven Trials of Rustam. This story can be found as a rare interpolation in a number of *Shāhnāma* manuscripts and in a unique manuscript copy known as *Shabrangnāma*, preserved at Leiden University Library.

Mardi, 10 novembre 2026, 17-19h

Witches, sorcerers, and witchcraft in the *Shāhnāma* and a closer look at the *Barzūnāma* manuscript tradition

One of the major so-called secondary or later epics, composed as a sequel to the “unfinished” life of Suhrāb, so tragically cut short by his own father Rustam, is the story on Barzū or Burzū. Especially from the 15th century onwards, stories on this formidable grandson of Rustam frequently appear as an interpolation in *Shāhnāma* manuscripts. Barzū is also prominent in the oral traditions connected to the *Shāhnāma*, and these oral traditions found their way “back” into the manuscript tradition in the form of *tumārs* or “scrolls”, representing the stories that were orally delivered and performed, and also in a few manuscripts, such as for example the voluminous manuscripts BnF Supplément persan 499 and 499a of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. In this lecture we will look specifically at one particular part of the Barzū-cycle: the storyline on the witch Sūsan as featured in BnF Supplément persan 497, in relation to the wider topic of witchcraft and sorcery in the *Shāhnāma*.

Vendredi, 13 novembre 2026, 17-19h

The Wise Counsels of Anūshīrvān: The *Pandnāma-yi Anūshīrvān* in the *Safīna-yi Tabrīz* and its relation to the episode of Nūshīrvān in Firdawsī’s *Shāhnāma*

In Persian literature and history, many legendary accounts exist on the Sasanian king Anūshīrvān (r. 531-579), famous for his just rule and the prosperity of the empire during his reign. One of the longest accounts is in poetry, and can be found in the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī. The episode on Anūshīrvān (Nūshīrvān), as well as the episode on the first Sasanian king, Ardashīr, in many ways illustrate the “mirror for princes” aspect of the *Shāhnāma* and the importance of wise counsel (*andarz*) throughout the epic. This lecture will explore the connections between the *Shāhnāma* and versions of a work known as *Pandnāma-yi Anūshīrvān*, starting with the version included in the 14th-century manuscript miscellany *Safīna-yi Tabrīz*, with a view to demonstrate how the *Pandnāma-yi Anūshīrvān* can be viewed as an exponent of the extensive afterlife of the *Shāhnāma*.

Lundi, 16 novembre 2026, 17-19h

Firdawsī and the story of Joseph between Shiraz and Herat in the early 15th century: text and context of an early manuscript of *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā*

This lecture will focus on the emergence, nature and context of a narrative poem on the prophet Joseph (Yūsuf) and Zulaykhā, composed in the metre *mutaqārib* and ascribed to Firdawsī. Many Persian prose and poetry renditions exist on the widely known love story about Yūsuf and Zulaykhā, which is based on Biblical and Quranic narratives. The first traces of *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā* in *mutaqārib*, connected to Firdawsī, appear in the early 15th century. Studies on this *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā* are quite rare; if it discussed at all, it is mostly in the framework of the disputed attribution to Firdawsī and the questions surrounding the authorship of the many versions of this text. In this lecture, I will focus in particular on some aspects of an enigmatic illustrated manuscript kept in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, and believed to be the oldest manuscript of *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā* in *mutaqārib*.

