

Dr. Roxana Zenhari

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I am a historian of Islamic art and visual culture, with a particular focus on Persian art. Originally trained as a painter, I pursued advanced studies in the History of Art and completed my Ph.D. in Iranian Studies at the Georg-August University of Göttingen in 2012.

My research centres on fourteenth-century Persian book arts, especially those produced under the Inju dynasty (1307–1353). I explore the dynamic interplay between text and image within these works, examining how they engage with the prevailing cultural and political discourses of their time.

Employing an interdisciplinary and intertextual approach, my work investigates how meaning is constructed, knowledge is transmitted, and how visual production engages with its readers. My recent projects have included collaborative research on early illustrated lithographed books printed during 1796–1925, considering them as a continuation and transformation of manuscript traditions in early modern Iran.

Education

PhD, Philosophy, Iranian Studies, Georg-August-University Göttingen, Germany.
Dissertation: “The Persian Medieval Romance Samak-e ‘ayyār; Analysis of an Illustrated Inju Manuscript.” 2008–12

MA, History of Islamic Art, Tehran University of Art, Iran. Master’s thesis: “An Analysis of the St. Petersburg Illustrated Manuscript of the Shāhnāma.” 2005

Employment

Since 2015	Lecturer in Department of Iranian Studies, Georg-August-University, Göttingen
2023–25	Research associate and coordinator of the project European Perspectives in Dialogue: Central Asia and Western Research
2019–20	Research fellow in Stadt Museum, Oldenburg
2017–19	Research associate and faculty member in Department of Iranian Studies, Georg-August-University, Göttingen
2014–17	Research associate in Academy of Sciences (Akademie der Wissenschaften), Göttingen
2009–13	Research associate as PhD student in Enzyklopädie des Märchens (Encyclopaedia of the Folk Tale), DFG Project

2005–08 Lecturer in Islamic Art History in Tehran University of Art, Iran, Faculty of applied art, Tehran

Research Projects

- 2023–24 Research associate and coordinator of the project European Perspectives in Dialogue: Central Asia and Western Research. Focused on the study of texts and images as mediums of knowledge transmission across manuscripts, early photography, and printed travelogues, with a particular emphasis on material culture, visuality, and cross-cultural encounters.
- 2014–17 Postdoc researcher, worked on the project *Mirzā ‘Ali-Qoli Kho‘i: Analytical review of the total work of the main artist of early lithographic illustrations in Persian books*. Georg-August-University Göttingen.
- 2009–13 Research associate, categorized Persian and Arabic folk tales in *Encyclopedia of Stories (Enzyklopädie des Märchens)*, Göttingen.

Courses taught (selective)

- Since 2015 As lecturer in Seminar for Iranian Studies and History of Art department in Georg-August-University Göttingen:
- “Codicological Studies, Palaeography and the arts of the book in Medieval Islamic manuscript” (graduate seminar)
- “Text and Images in Persian classical literature and popular stories, 13th–19th Century” (undergraduate/graduate seminar)
- “Introduction to Islamic Art and Iconography” (undergraduate seminar)
- “Planning and conceptualising an Exhibition: 19th Century Photography in Moslem lands” (graduate seminar)
- “Art and Material Culture in the Early Modernity Iran: Struggle Between Tradition and Modernity from Safavid to Early Qajar” (graduate seminar)
- “A challenge between tradition and modernism in Islamic painting: 19th–21th Century” (graduate seminar)

Publications

Books

- 2014 Zenhari, Roxana. *The Persian Romance Samak-e 'ayyār, Analysis of an illustrated Inju Manuscript*. Dortmund, Germany: Verlag für Orientkunde 42, 2014. (380 pages, 129 illustrations, ISBN 978-3-936687-42-0)
- 2022 Marzolph, Ulrich; Zenhari, Roxana. *Mirzā 'Ali-Qoli Kho'i The Master Illustrator of Persian Lithographed Books in the Qajar Period*. Two volumes. Brill, 2022. (239+487 pages, 2000 illustrations)

Articles

- 2021 Zenhari, Roxana. "Picture Narration and Oral Performance: Representing the Chain of Events in the Illustrated Medieval Persian Romance Samak-e 'ayyār." In *Beiträge zur Islamischen Kunst und Archäologie*. Vol. 7, pp. 241–254, Wiesbaden, Germany: Reichert Verlag, 2021. (ISBN 978-3-95490-504-1)
- 2018 Zenhari, Roxana. "Visual and Textual Medieval Humor in Honor of Femininity: Inju cases." In *Terra Ridens: A Festschrift in Honor of Ulrich Marzolph*. Vol. 1, pp. 67–88, Dortmund, Germany: Verlag für Orientkunde, 2018. (ISBN 3-936687-45-5)
- 2014 Marzolph, Ulrich and Roxana Zenhari. "As Makke tā Mashhad: ṭumār-e taṣviri az safar-e ziyārati-ye shi'i dar dourān-e qājār." Translated by Roxana Zenhari. *Nāme-ye Bahārestān* 2, pp. 22–55, 2014. [In English.] "From Mecca to Mashhad: The Narrative of an Illustrated Shi'i Pilgrimage Scroll from the Qajar Period." *Muqarnas* 31, pp. 207–242, 2014.
- 2007 Zenhari, Roxana. "An Analysis of St. Petersburg Illustrated Manuscript of Shāhnāme 733/1333." Peer reviewed journal, *Quarterly Book of Art*. [In Farsi.] "Naqde majālesi az Shāhnāme-ye St. Petersburg 733/1333." *Fasl-nāme-ye Honar* 72, pp. 127–153, 1386/2007. (ISSN: 1726-3794)
- 2005 Zenhari, Roxana. "The Demons Dancing: An Interpretation of a Work of the Timurid Artist Moḥammad Siyāhqalam." Peer reviewed journal, *Book of Culture* 17, pp. 86–100, 1384/2005. [In Farsi.] "Naqd va taḥlil-e divān-e raqsande aṣar-e Moḥammad Siyāhqalam." *Barg-e Farhang* 17, pp. 86–100, 1384/2005.
- 2004 Zenhari, Roxana. "A Methodology to Analyze Images: Michel Foucault Epistemology and the Images of Madness." Peer reviewed journal, *Book of Art* 24, pp. 28–51. [In Farsi.] "Shenākhtshenāsi-ye Michel Foucault dar taḥlil-e taṣāvir-e jonun." *Honar-nāme* 24, pp. 28–51, 1383/2004.

Review

- 2020 Zenhari, Roxana. Review of Barry Wood's "The Adventures of Shāh Esmā'il, a Seventeenth-Century Persian Popular Romance." In *SOAS Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*. Vol. 83, issue 3, pp. 529–530, 2020.

Lecture and Paper Presentation

2025 London	“From Manuscript to Carpet: The Talking Tree Motif in the Service of Safavid Sufi Discourse” Lecture series of Persian manuscripts association.
2025 Oxford/ Toronto	“Early Illustrated Persian Lithographed Books as a Historical Record of the Revitalization of Religious Identity against the Bāb Movement” Lecture series of Rethinking history: Returning to archives and documents.
2024 MESA	“Tracing the Conventions of and Deviations from Manuscript Culture in the Lithographed Books of Sa‘di in the Persianate World”
2023 Samarkand	“Henry Moser Collection in Bern Historical Museum: From Tehran to Samarkand” Samarkand State University, History department.
2022 Salamanca	“The Change of Shi‘i Messages in Inscribed Grave Rugs: From Safavid to Qajar” Thirteenth Biennial Iranian Studies Conference.
2022 Göttingen	"The Emergence of Visual Arts in the Context of the Current Protests in Iran" An online lecture; 19. Oktober 2022.
2021 Rome	“Vāq Motif from Manuscripts to Carpets: The Formation of the New Myth about Death and the Afterlife in Safavid Grave Rugs” Ernst Herzfeld Society, 16th Colloquium.
2019 Berlin	“Men of Farang in Illustrated Martyrdom Stories from Safavids to the Qajar Period: An Invitation to Islam or a Quest to Legitimize Shi‘i Beliefs?” Ninth European Conference of Iranian Studies. Freie Universität Berlin.
2019 London SOAS	“Rethinking Injuid Painting School: Inju Style in Context.” A hybrid lecture. Research Seminar in Islamic Art, Department of the History of Art and Archaeology; SOAS University.
2019 Tehran Malek M.	“Sa‘di’s Poems in the Frames of ‘Ali-Qoli Khu‘i, the Prolific Illustrator of the Early Persian Printed Books.” A hybrid lecture in Malek Museum.
2018 Tehran University	“Iconography of a <i>jawānmard</i> in the Illustrated Manuscript of Samak-e ‘ayyār.” A lecture in Tehran Art University.
2018 Strasburg	“Qajarian Lithography: “Creating Images not for a Privileged Few.” Ernst Herzfeld Society, 14th Colloquium.
2017 Cambridge	“Prophecy and Propagating Shi‘i Islam among the Folks: A Survey of Visual Culture of Qajar Period.” Third Biennial Symposia Iranica.

- 2017
Vienna “Reconstruction of Shi‘i Islam among the Folks: A Survey of Illustrated Lithographed Books of Qajar Period.” Ernst Herzfeld Society, 13th Colloquium.
- 2016
Vienna “‘Irregular’ Illustrations: Mirzā ‘Ali-Qoli Kho‘i’s Visual Representation of Sa‘di’s Poems.” Eleventh Biennial Iranian Studies Conference.
- 2015
Cambridge “Is There a Visual Code to Recognize a Follower of Chivalry?” Second Biennial Symposia Iranica.
- 2014
Hamburg “Narrative Images and the Art of Narration in Representing the Chain of Events in Parde-khāni Performance.” 10th Annual Symposium of the Ernst Herzfeld Gesellschaft.
- 2013
Göttingen “Visual Representation of an ‘ayyār: A Model or a Rival for the Prince?” Conference: Mirror for the Princes.
- 2012
Istanbul “Concepts and Images in Samak-e ‘ayyār Romance.” 9th Biennial of Iranian Studies.
- 2011
Krakow “Painters’ Interpretations of Ferdusi’s Twelve Rukh Scenes with a Concentration on two Inju manuscripts.” 7th European Conference of Iranian Studies.
- 2010
Marburg “The St. Petersburg Shāhnāma, an Admiration for Monarchy or Manliness?” 31. Deutscher Orientalistentag.
- 2010
Heidelberg “The Symbolic Language of Victory and Defeat in the Manuscript of Samak-e ‘ayyār.” In the workshop The Way I See It: Transcultural Perspectives on Image, Gaze and Perception, Asia and Europe in a Global Context.
- 2008
Tehran-Zabol “The Mystical Language of Victory and Defeat in St. Petersburg Copy of Shāhnāma.” International Conference of Illustrated Shāhnāma manuscripts.
- 2004
Tehran “Fractal Theory and Islamic Geometric Design.” Conference of Islamic Art and Nationality. Tehran.