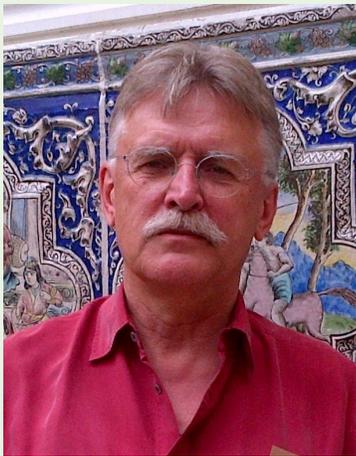


The Visual Culture of Iranian Twelver Shiism in the Qajar Period

Ulrich Marzolph
(Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Göttingen)

December 7, 2017, 6:00-7:00 pm

Dilworth Room, IAS



Ulrich Marzolph is a professor of Islamic studies at the Georg-August-University in Göttingen, Germany. He specializes in exploring the Narrative Culture of the Muslim world, including its links to both visual culture and the history of printing. Having served on the editorial committee of the *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* (1986–2015), he is now conducting a research project that studies the impact of narratives originating from the Muslim world in Western oral tradition. He has published widely, including a number of studies on narrative illustration in Persian lithographed books and on modern Iranian martyr murals.

Profiting from the heritage of ancient Iran, where images played an important role, the culture of Iranian Twelver Shiism practices a distinct approach to the visual representation of its themes and topics. The visual representation of Shii themes and topics is witnessed in a wide array of genres, ranging from manuscripts and nineteenth-century printed books via narrative tilework and the canvasses of popular storytellers to twentieth-century murals. The most salient feature of Shii imagery is its close and, in fact, indispensable connection to a narrative level. The narrative cosmos of the Shii community focuses on its pivotal trauma, the death of the Prophet Muhammad's grandson Husayn and his followers during the battle of Karbala. This includes the prowess of Husayn's father Ali, the revenge taken in the aftermath of Karbala, and the fate of Husayn's descendants, in particular the Shii imams. The documentation of Iranian Shii visual culture was particularly rich in the Qajar period, when the ritual performances of the "Persian passion play," the *ta'ziye*, coincided with the introduction of printing to Iran, fostering a growing prominence of Shii themes on both narrative and visual levels.

My presentation will outline the general features relevant for the study of Shii visual culture. By discussing Qajar period images as documented in tilework, lithographed books, and the narrative canvasses of popular storytellers, I will document the more "popular" aspects of Shii visual culture. Through the capturing appeal of illustrations that embody the emotional narratives of Shiism's historical experience, this imagery has contributed decisively to the firm establishment of the Twelver Shii creed in Iran.

School of Historical Studies
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