

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Persian Studies Program

News for Alumni and Friends

2016-2017



Message from Dr. Carl Ernst, Director of Persian Studies

Thanks to the enthusiasm of students and the dedication of faculty, the UNC Persian Studies Program is continuing to flourish, with a strong Persian language program guided by faculty members Shahla Adel and Claudia Yaghoobi. The arrival of Professor Yaghoobi, made possible by the support of the Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute, means that students can now take advantage of a minor in Persian studies. Courses relating to Persian studies are available in the departments of Art, Asian Studies, History, and Religious Studies. UNC students and faculty continue to benefit from the generous support of library programs by members of the local Iranian-American community. I would also like to take the opportunity to welcome to the Persian studies faculty Professor Jennifer Gates-Foster of the Classics Department; a specialist in ancient history, Professor Gates-Foster has studied the Achaemenid Empire and promises to deliver a talk on her research in the near future. In short, the future of Persian studies at UNC is indeed bright.



Professor Carl Ernst

-Carl W. Ernst

William R. Kenan Jr. Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies, director of UNC Persian Studies, co-director of the Carolina Center for the Study of the Middle East and Muslim Civilizations

New Faculty Member in Persian Studies

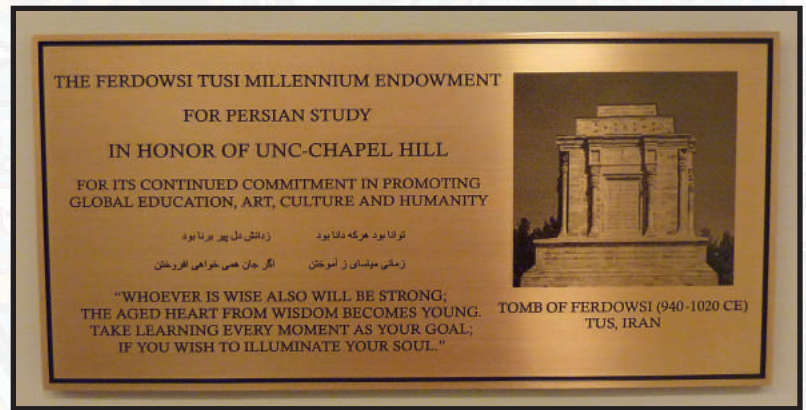


Dr. Claudia Yaghoobi

Dr. Claudia Yaghoobi was named Roshan Institute Assistant Professor in Persian Studies in the UNC College of Arts and Sciences at UNC-Chapel Hill beginning July 2016. Yaghoobi earned her first master's degree in English Language and Literature from Islamic Azad University (IAU) in Tehran. She was an IAU Assistant Professor of English Language for nine years. She earned a second master's degree in the United States at Cal State Los Angeles, and completed her doctoral studies in the Comparative literature Program at the University of California at Santa Barbara with an emphasis in Feminist Studies in 2013. Yaghoobi taught courses on Iran and the Middle East in a tenure track position at Georgia College and State University for three years before joining UNC. Her appointment was made possible by an endowment from Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute.

Ferdowsi Tusi Millennium Endowment for Persian Study

In late 2015, a family of anonymous donors generously established the Ferdowsi Tusi Millennium Endowment for the Persian Study Program. This \$30,000, permanently endowed fund is for the advancement of Persian language and culture and will benefit the UNC Library. The fund will support an annual essay competition for students in the field of Persian studies with a prize for the best essay. The first competition will take place during the 2017-18 academic year.



Photographed is the plaque honoring the Ferdowsi Endowment to UNC-Chapel Hill

Ferdowsi Tusi was born in 940 in Tus province of Khorasan, Iran. He belonged to the class of deghans (farmers). Ferdowsi flourished in the Samanid dynasty. In the late 10th century the master Persian poet, Ferdowsi Tusi, dedicated thirty years of his life to write his epic poem, "The Book of Kings" or Shahnameh. Through 60,000 lines of poetry, the Shahnameh revived Persian language, history, philosophy and culture almost 400 years after the Arab invasion of the Persian Empire. Ferdowsi's Shahnameh is considered Persia's national epic poem.

It spans the history of fifty generations of rulers and subjects, where races and nationalities change, but culture, justice, humanity and human values remain the same. Ferdowsi Tusi is not only the voice of Persian consciousness and character, but also a universal voice of humanity's core values across all races and cultures. The UNC Library will continue to seek creative ways to grow the endowment. For more information about the Library's Persian studies collection and ways to support it, please contact Dwain Teague, Director of Library Development at dteague@email.unc.edu, 919-962-3437.

Ferdowsi Tusi Millennium Endowment Persian Literature and Culture Paper Award



Ferdowsi Tusi (940-1080 CE)

The Persian Studies Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is pleased to announce the Ferdowsi Tusi Millennium Memorial Endowment Persian Literature and Culture Annual Paper Award. We welcome papers from various disciplines and all historical periods of Iran. We are interested in interdisciplinary approaches.

A committee of three reviewers review the papers and announce the winner. The winner is required to attend the UNC annual Nowruz Celebration and give a talk on the topic of their paper. For more information, please contact Dr. Claudia Yaghoobi at yaghoobi@email.unc.edu.

Events Sponsored by Persian Studies, 2016 2017

Sacred/Secular: A Sufi Journey

“Sacred/Secular: A Sufi Journey” was a year-long exploration of Sufism as a spiritual and cultural lens into Islam through the work of performers from four Muslim-majority nations outside the Arab world: Indonesia, Iran, Pakistan, and Senegal. The festival was hosted as part of the Carolina Performing Arts 2016-2017 season. This project evolved from a desire to refute monolithic thinking about the practice of Islam and about Muslim communities and individuals, to contest the notion that there is any single narrative of Muslim identity or experience, a notion which is reinforced by over-simplified presentations of Muslims in our national discourse. The series featured two Iranian artists: Hossein Alizadeh and Susan Deyhim, as well as a performance by Philip Glass and Laurie Anderson *Words and Music in Two Parts*. Glass and Anderson shared musical moments and poetry readings followed by a selection of Glass songs featuring lyrics by 13th-century Sufi poet Rumi. The performances of Sussan Deyhim and of Philip Glass with Laurie Anderson were made possible by a Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute grant in the amount of \$150,000.



Hossein Alizadeh performing at UNC

Hossein Alizadeh, Mystical Music

One of the most important figures in contemporary Iranian music, master composer, instrumentalist, conductor, researcher and teacher Hossein Alizadeh performs new interpretations of classical Persian music. Within this expansive tradition, he continues his incomparable reinventions of melodies handed down from master to student through generations. A virtuoso player of the tar, sehtar and Azeri tar (Iran’s ancient plucked lutes), he has appeared throughout Europe and North America as a soloist and member of the Masters of Persian Music supergroup, and was nominated for a Grammy Award for Best World Music Album for his *Endless Vision* recording with Armenian musician Djivan Gasparyan.

Susan Deyhim, The House is Black

Inspired by the works of Forough Farrokhzad, one of Iran’s most influential feminist poets and filmmakers, this stirring multimedia piece sheds light on the importance of Iranian contemporary arts. Iranian American performance artist/composer Sussan Deyhim examines the prophetic vision of Farrokhzad, whose message is as relevant today as it was 50 years ago when she died at the age of 32. Co-directed by award-winning director Robert Egan, *The House is Black* features Deyhim’s striking visual projections along with archival footage including Farrokhzad’s 1965 interview with Bernardo Bertolucci. The original score by Deyhim and Golden Globe-winning composer Richard Horowitz is rooted in Persian and Western contemporary classical music, jazz and electronic music. Featured on film soundtracks including *Argo* and *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Sussan Deyhim has worked with Martin Scorsese, Oliver Stone, Peter Gabriel and Bobby McFerrin, among others.



Susan Deyhim performing October 28, 2016

Persian Lecture Series by Dr. Moshen Kadivar: Commentary on Gulshan-i Raz

Gulshan-i Rāz is the most eminent poetry work of a renowned 14th century Persian Sufi poet and gnostic, Mahmoūd Shabestarī, one of the most prominent scholars of the Islamic mysticism. His poetry, very concisely, sheds light on a broad range of topics in Islamic mystical thought. His masterpiece, Gulshan-i Rāz, is a response to the questions posed to him by Amīr Hussain Harawi concerning Sufi metaphysics and the intricacies of mystical doctrine. Each poetry section is preceded by a question (su'āl) to which he provides an answer to either in the form of theory (qā'ida) or illustration (tamthīl). His poetry, very concisely, sheds light on a broad range of topics in Islamic mystical thought for which it has received a great deal of attention over centuries and numerous commentaries ever since. In fall 2016, UNC Persian Studies partnered with the Iranian Circle of Culture and Wisdom to host a five-part lecture series on Gulshan-i Rāz ("The Rose Garden of the Secret"), featuring commentary by Professor Moshen Kadivar. The events were held: August 26, September 16, October 13, November 11, and December 2. Professor Moshen Kadivar is an Iranian philosopher and research professor of Islamic Studies at Duke University. These events were held in Persian and open to all who speak Persian or love Persian mystical literature.

Wars and Veterans: A Panel Discussion

On Tuesday, February 21, 2017, UNC Persian Studies hosted an inspiring panel on Wars and Veterans of the Iran-Iraq War. The panelists, Dr. Mateo Mohammad Farzaneh and Dr. Amir Khadem, discussed the role of women in the Iran-Iraq war, the trauma of war, and its impacts on both civilians and veterans. The panel was moderated by Dr. Brian Gibbs, Assistant Professor of Education at UNC, who conducts research on wars, veterans, and the education of veterans' children.



Dr. Blake Atwood

Blake Atwood, "Reform Cinema in Iran"

As part of the UNC spring Nowruz celebration, Blake Atwood of the University of Texas at Austin discussed his book *Reform Cinema in Iran* in a free public program at the Art Gallery in the Frank Porter Graham Student Union at UNC on March 26, 2017. Blake Atwood is an assistant professor in the Department of Middle Eastern Studies, where he is also the coordinator of the Persian language program. His research focuses on the history of Iranian cinema, and he is particularly interested in the intersection of film, technology, and politics in the Islamic Republic. His first book, *Reform Cinema in Iran: Film and Political Change in the Islamic Republic* (Columbia University Press, 2016), examines the unlikely partnership that developed between the popular Reformist Movement and the film industry between 1990 and 2007. He has begun work on a second book manuscript that examines how video technology has refashioned movie culture in Iran. A selection of recent additions to the UNC Library's Persian collection was also on view during the program. This event was organized by the UNC Libraries and UNC Persian Studies.

Middle Eastern Women Writers and their Impacts

On Tuesday, January 24, 2017, UNC Persian Studies hosted a panel of two scholars on Middle Eastern women writers. The panelists elaborated on the significance of women's writing in contemporary Middle East as well as the challenges they have faced. Dr. Nesreen Akhtarkhvari, Associate Professor and Director of Arabic Studies at DePaul University, spoke on Jordanian women writers and their influence in local and regional literary spheres. Professor Nasrin Rahimeih, Howard Baskerville Professor of Humanities and Comparative Literature at the University of California Irvine, spoke on the female experience in Iran after the 1979 revolution expressed through literature. The panel was moderated by Professor Nadia Yaqub, UNC Department of Asian Studies.

Book Signing with Professor Mateo Farzaneh

On Monday, February 20, 2017, Professor Mateo Farzaneh, Associate Professor of History at Northeastern University, gave a book talk on his most recent book, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution and the Clerical Leadership of Khorasani*. Professor Farzaneh discussed the role of Islamic jurisprudence in political reform in Iran. Throughout the 1800s, Iran was challenged to politically modernize in order to undo the failed policies of its corrupt/absolutist monarchical system. Introduction of Western-style constitutionalism by secular Iranians brought about the establishment of the Islamic world's first parliament in Iran in 1906. However, that was the beginning of a long struggle between the proponents and the opponents of rule of law as a new political reality. Mullah Muhammad Kazim Khorasani led a group of high-ranking Iranian Shiite clerics living in Iraq and began a transnational clerical movement in support of constitutionalism with the objective to sever the political influence of Muslim clerics and leaving "modern" politics to the elected parliamentarians.

UNC Persian Cultural Society Events

The Persian Cultural Society is an active student group that supports the understanding of Persian culture by sponsoring social and cultural events. This year, the Persian Cultural Society supported two annual cultural celebrations: 1001 Nights and a Nowruz Celebration.

1001 Nights, held on November 9, 2016, was an opportunity for the university and greater community to explore the greater Middle East through performances, delicious food, calligraphy, and interactive cultural booths. The event was sponsored by UNC Persian Studies, and other participating organizations included the Arab Student Organization, Iranian Student Organization of NC State, and UNC Davis Library.

The Persian Cultural Society also hosted an event on March 26, 2017 to celebrate Nowruz, Persian New Year 1396. The student group organized a diverse program of performances, a delicious Iranian dinner, and dancing with a DJ. The event aimed to support Iranian performers and provide an opportunity for the community to engage in Iran's vibrant, long-lasting traditions. The event was extremely well-attended and was sold out in advance of the evening. The Persian Cultural Society plays an important role in supporting understanding of Persian culture on campus.

Faculty Awards and Grants, 2016 -2017

Shahla Adel, Teaching Assistant Professor in Persian, Department of Asian Studies

- Writing Proficiency Rater Training Workshop introducing OPI Testers to the ACTFL Writing Scale and the protocol for rating the ACTFL Writing Proficiency Test held at UNC Chapel Hill, December 18-19, 2017.

Carl Ernst, William R. Kenan, Jr., Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies

- Global Humanities Translation Prize, Buffett Institute - Northwestern University, 2017, for Hallaj: Poems of a Sufi Martyr (forthcoming in 2018 from Northwestern University Press).
- Mellon Distinguished Fellow, Arts@The Core Program, Carolina Performing Arts, 2016-17.

Claudia Yaghoobi, Roshan Institute Assistant Professor in Persian Studies

- Graduate Research Consultant Program, Office of Undergraduate Research (OUR), Fall 2017. Grant was used for graduate student support.
- University Research Council Grant for Research in Iran on temporary marriage, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, June 2017.
- First Year Seminar Course Development Grant for Wars and Veterans: Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, spring 2017.
- Conference organization grant, with University of California at Santa Barbara Iranian Studies Initiative Director Professor Janet Afary to organize a conference in Abu Dhabi, New York University Abu Dhabi Institute, January 2017. \$50,000.
- University Research Council Grant for Publication Support for copy-editing and indexing of monograph Subjectivity in 'Attar, Persian Sufism, and European Mysticism, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, fall 2016.

Faculty Research and Publications

Shahla Adel, Teaching Assistant Professor in Persian, Department of Asian Studies

Adel, S. (Forthcoming). Design, Evaluation, and Selection of Textbooks for Persian as a Foreign Language. In F. Farrokh (Ed.), Bright Diversities of Day. Los Angeles: Mazda Publishers.

Carl Ernst, William R. Kenan, Jr., Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies

“Tabaqat-i adyan-i Hind dar `ahd-i inglisiyan-i Hind (Anglo-Persian Taxonomies of Indian Religions) [in Persian].” Iran Namag 1/3 (Fall 2016), pp. 82-103.

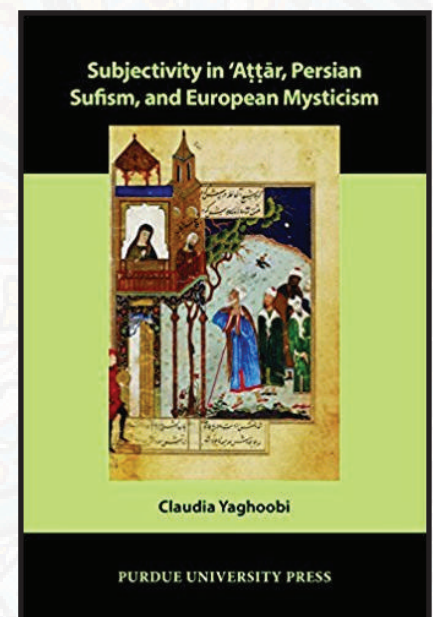
- Refractions of Islam in India: Situating Sufism and Yoga. New Delhi: Yoda Press/Sage, 2016.

Claudia Yaghoobi, Roshan Institute Assistant Professor in Persian Studies

- Subjectivity in 'Attar, Persian Sufism, and European Mysticism. Comparative Cultural Studies Series. Purdue: Purdue University Press, 2017.

- “Socially Peripheral, Symbolically Central: Sima in Behrouz Afkhami’s Shokaran.” Asian Cinema Journal, Iranian Female Sexuality Special Issue, Issue 27. 2 (2016): 151-163. R

- “Yusuf ’s “Queer” Beauty in Persian Cultural Productions.”



Subjectivity in 'Attar book cover

Faculty Lectures and Presentations

Shahla Adel, Teaching Assistant Professor in Persian, Department of Asian Studies

- "Language Learning Strategies of Heritage learners of Persian and Arabic," American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages Convention held in Nashville, Tennessee, November 17-19, 2017.

Carl Ernst, William R. Kenan, Jr., Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies

- Organizer of conference, "ZIKR | Locating Sufi Performance: Critical Perspectives on Music, Ritual, and Remembrance" Université Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar, Senegal, June 5-7, 2017.

- "Mysticism and Community in the Arabic Poems of al-Hallaj," Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia, Tokyo University, Japan, May 23, 2017.

- "Orientalist Legacies and the Academic Construction of Sufism," Conference on "Islamic Studies and the Study of Sufism in Academia: Rethinking Methodologies," Kenan Rifai Center for Sufi Studies, Kyoto University, Japan, May 20-21, 2017.

- "Erasing Difference? Questions about Universalism and Toleration, from the Mughals to Today" (Keynote lecture), Conference on "A History Of Difference: Piety and Space in Early Modern West Asia," Columbia University, May 4-5, 2017.

- "Signposts to the Unseen in the Premodern Muslim Cosmos" (Keynote lecture), Conference on "The Islamic Multiverse and Histories of Everyday Social Discourse" New York University, Abu Dhabi, May 1-2, 2017.

- "Concepts of Religion in the Dabistan-i mazahib" and "Early Orientalist Concepts of Sufism." Dinshaw J Irani Memorial Lectures, K. R. Cama Oriental Institute, Mumbai, India, July 18-19.

- "The Dabistan and Orientalist views of Sufism." School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, May 24, 2016.

- "Disentangling the Different Persian Translations of The Pool of Nectar (Amrtakunda)," The Fourth Perso-Indica Conference: "Translation and the languages of Islam: Indo Persian tarjuma in a comparative perspective," Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, December 5-7, 2016.

Claudia Yaghoobi, Roshan Institute Assistant Professor in Persian Studies

- "The Abject Outsider vis-à-vis the Dominant Masculinity in Yousef and Farhad Struggling for family acceptance in Iran: the story of two gay men." The Department of Asian Studies, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC. February 15, 2017.

- "Forugh Farrokhzad and Sussan Deyhim." Carolina Performing Arts at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC. October 28, 2016.

- "Psycho-Sexuality in the Sufism of Rabi'a al-Adawiyya." Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy, Salt Lake, Utah. October 19, 2016.

- "The Question of Armenian Identity in Zoya Pirzad's 'The Day Before Easter'." Association for Iranian Studies, Vienna, Austria. August 3, 2016.

- "Yusuf 's Queer Masculinity in Persian Cultural Productions." American Comparative Literature Association, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. March 17, 2016.

Graduate Student Awards and Travels Abroad

Patrick D'Silva: With funding from the Roshan Institute Fellowship for Excellence in Persian Studies and the Medieval and Early Modern Studies committee at UNC, Patrick D'Silva (Religious Studies) conducted archival research at the British Library and Cambridge University in May 2017. His dissertation analyzes a group of Persian manuscripts from India and Iran that contain instructions for using knowledge of the breath for divination purposes. The manuscripts are testimony to the high degree of exchange between practitioners of Yoga and Sufism in South Asia prior to the era of British colonialism. Patrick is pictured here at Cambridge University, viewing the manuscript that inspired his dissertation project, originally acquired by Edward Granville Browne in Khuy, Iran, 1887.



Patrick D'Silva studies texts



Candace Mixon in Iran

Candace Mixon: Supported by the Roshan Fellowship for Excellence in Persian Studies, Candace Mixon, doctoral candidate in Islamic studies in the Department of Religious Studies at the UNC-Chapel Hill, conducted research in Persian studies summer 2016. A large portion of Mixon's dissertation research focuses on the intersections of Persian language, visual and material cultural production, and the family of the Prophet Muhammad in contemporary Iran.

Katie Hewit graduated in May 2017. She was a Persian FLAS Fellow and did an immersion program at UW-Madison during summer 2016. She was awarded the Herbert Scoville Jr. Peace Fellow and is currently working in the Arms Control and Nonproliferation Initiative at Brookings Institution. Please check her information at <http://scoville.org/fellows/current/>

Graduate Student Conference Presentations

Patrick D'Silva, Department of Religious Studies

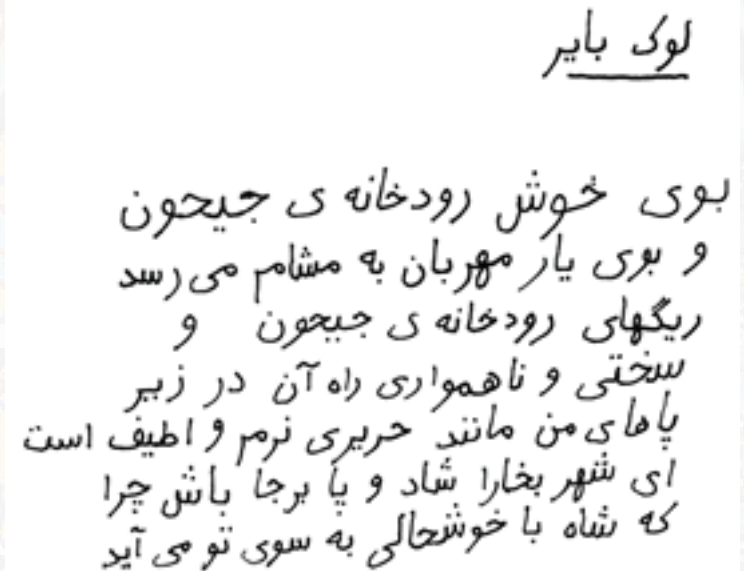
- "A Hindu bismillah? A Clash of Categories in Two Indian Persian MSS" Presentation of research paper at Southeastern Commission for the Study of Religion, Study of Islam group. March 2017.
- "Do Sufi Occultists Dream of Electric Sheep? Magical Constructions of Authenticity in a Nineteenth-Century Persian Manuscript" American Academy of Religion, Study of Islam & Islamic Mysticism groups. November 2016.

Persian Studies Minor Students

Luke Beyer: "I began learning the Persian language in high school thanks to the National Security Language Initiative for Youth (NSLI-Y) which provided me with the opportunity to study Tajiki for a summer in Tajikistan. One of the biggest factors in choosing Carolina for me was the presence of such a strong, active, and growing Persian Studies program. As a Persian Studies minor, I have had the privilege of studying Farsi for four semesters so far. I have also taken courses that have allowed me to engage in the study of the history, culture, and literature of Iran. These include a course on Islamic art and architecture during the caliphate period and a course on Iranian prison literature. All of the professors are engaging and clearly passionate about their field of study. Thanks to such an active Persian Cultural Society (PCS), there are many cultural events available throughout the semester to engage with the local Iranian community as well. I would definitely recommend this program to anyone interested in Iran and the surrounding Persian region."



Luke Beyer, Persian Studies Minor student



Sample of Beyer's Persian work

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Thank you for your interest in and engagement with UNC Persian Studies. We are grateful for the financial support of our alumni and friends. Private gifts help sustain our programs. Please consider making a tax-deductible contribution to support the many activities of UNC Persian Studies.

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Attn: Chris Davis
University of North Carolina Chapel Hill
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For more information about making donations to specific programs, or suggestions on how you can help support Persian Studies at UNC, please contact: Chris Davis, Assistant Director of Development, UNC Arts and Science Foundation at (919) 843-6058 or Christopher.davis@unc.edu.

Your gift is greatly appreciated!