Program of Iranian Studies

The Program of Iranian Studies at UCLA, established half a century ago, in 1963, is one of the largest and most comprehensive doctoral programs of its kind in the Americas. It covers the entire spectrum of Iranian studies across disciplines, linguistic boundaries, and periods. Among its distinctive strengths is the focus on Old and Middle Iranian philology, ancient Iranian history and religions, archaeology, as well as the study of classical and modern Persian literature. In addition, courses in Judeo-Persian literature and Baba’s history and religion are regularly read in the Program.

For more information
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Parking
Parking spaces are available at Parking Structure 2 (602 Charles E. Young Drive East, Los Angeles, CA 90095). Parking attendants will be present at the gate from 3:30pm to 5:30pm to collect payments in cash. Parking permits can be purchased for $12.

Amin Banani: A Homage
UCLA Faculty Center
December 2, 2013
4:00-8:00pm.
Amin Banani was born in Tehran on September 23, 1926, the first of six siblings. He received his elementary education at the Zoroastrian School and attained the first rank in the all-Tehran final exams for the sixth grade. He completed the first three years of high school at the Alborz School and in 1943 in the midst of the Second World War he came to the United States on board a U.S. troopship, arriving in February 1944. Due to the more advanced curriculum of the Persian schools at the time, he was able to graduate from high school by June of 1944 as the valedictorian of his class. In September 1944 he was admitted to Stanford University and he graduated in 1947 with a major in history. He obtained his M.A. from Columbia University in 1949 and returned to Stanford for his Ph.D. He passed his oral exams with great distinction in October 1950, and then he left for Europe for a number of years and returned to finish his dissertation and receive his degree in 1959.

His academic career began with teaching history at the Overseas Program of the University of Maryland in Athens, Greece in 1956-58. Then he taught for one year as an Instructor at Stanford University in 1958-59; two years as an Assistant Professor of Humanities at Reed College, 1959-61; two years as a Research Fellow and Assistant Professor at Harvard University in 1961-63. In September 1963 he was invited to UCLA by Professor Gustave von Grunebaum to start the program of Persian studies. From the start his teaching was not narrowly focused but covered both history and literature. This broad encompassing of Persian cultural history was reflected in his research and scholarship... From his first book, The Modernization of Iran, published in 1961, to his latest contribution to the volume published by the Danish Academy of Sciences in 2008 entitled Religious Texts in Iranian Languages he concerned himself with vital aspects of a living and continuing cultural tradition. Some of the more significant writings of Amin Banani are chapters entitled “Ferdowsi and the Art of Tragic Epic” in Islam and its Cultural Divergence (1971); “The Conversion of a Self-Conscious Elite” in Individualism and Conformity in Classical Islam (1977); “Ahmad Kasravi and Purification of Persian: A Study in Nationalist Motivation” in Nation and Ideology (1982); and “Rumi, The Poet” in Mysticism and Poetry in Islam (1988). His collaborative translation with Jascha Kessler of the poetry of Forough Farrokhzad published in 1982 under the title Bride of Acacias was reviewed as the best translation of Persian poetry into English since Fitzgerald’s translation of Omar Khayyam. The same collaborative effort in 2005 yielded a beautiful volume of translation of the poems of Tahereh, the nineteenth century heroine of the Babi movement who sounded the clarion call of emancipation of women and equality of rights of men and women, entitled, Tahereh: A Portrait in Poetry.

In the course of more than thirty years of teaching at UCLA he laid the foundation of a broad and integrated program of Iranian Studies culminating in establishment of the first Undergraduate Major in Iranian Studies at any American university. His graduate teaching yielded a number of outstanding scholars who have occupied tenure positions at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, the University of Oxford, the University of Virginia, the University of Michigan and the University of California, Berkeley.

Amin Banani served on the Board of Directors of the Middle East Studies Association of North America, the Executive Council of the Society for Iranian Studies and Vice President of the American Association of Iranian Studies.

Unlike some academics who seek their fulfillment exclusively in their academic career, Amin Banani from the beginning led a rich life of service in the Baha’i community world-wide. In 1948 he served as a Baha’i Representative to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Lake Success, New York. In 1949 he was a Baha’i delegate to the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. In 1955 he was sent to Geneva to plead at the United Nations for relief of the grievous violations of the human rights of the Baha’is in Iran. In 1956 he was appointed to a permanent international committee for defense of the Baha’is of Iran. He was elected to the Baha’i Assemblies of Palo Alto, California; Athens, Greece; Portland, Oregon; Cambridge, Massachusetts; and Santa Monica, California. He taught at the Baha’i Summer Schools in the United States, England, Iran, Ireland, Italy, Switzerland and Germany. From 1980 to 2006 he served as the Deputy Trustee of a global Baha’i philanthropic fund.

Amin Banani was a passionate lover of music both eastern and western, and found much of his spiritual fulfillment in enjoyment of that art. He passed away on Sunday, July 28, 2013 in Santa Monica and is buried in the Woodlawn Cemetery, Santa Monica. He is survived by his wife Sheila Wolcott, daughters Susanne and Laila, two sons-in-law Shidan and Mehran Taslimi, two grandchildren Ruha and Abdi, and his brother Hosni.

Amin Banani was a Professor Emeritus of Persian History and Literature, University of California, Los Angeles 1926-2013.

Program

Coffee and Cookies

Introductions

David Schaberg, Dean, Humanities Division, UCLA

William Schniedewind, Chair, Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, UCLA

M. Rahim Shayegan, Director, Iranian Studies, UCLA

Life and Work of a Prominent Scholar

Ehsan Yarshater, Columbia University

Reminiscences of an Old Friend

Firuz Kazemzadeh, Yale University

My Teacher, Amin Banani

Farzaneh Milani, University of Virginia

Amin Banani’s Research Career: An Overview

Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, University of Maryland

Between the Residual and the Emergent: A Tribute to Amin Banani

Wali Ahmadi, University of California, Berkeley

Amin Banani and the Teaching of Iranian History

Touraj Daryaee, University of California, Irvine

Reminiscences

Latifeh Hagigi, UCLA

Reception