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 Baha’i history and religion are regularly read in the Program.

The Ehsan Yarshater Lecture Series

The Ehsan Yarshater Lecture Series are delivered by an outstanding scholar whose work has distinctively impacted the study of the Iranian Civilization. Each biennial lecture series consists of four to five lectures on a single theme that is subsequently elaborated and amplified into a monograph. The lectures represent original research and synthesis in all aspects of Iranian Studies, including archaeology and art history, as well as history, literature, the study of religions, and philosophy.

Sasanian Law in its Social Context
November 9-18, 2015

A series of five lectures

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Synopsis
Legal texts are among the more important sources for the reconstruction of the political and economic institutions, and cultural practices, of late-antique Iran, as they considerably further our understanding of past social complexities that are decisively different than our own. This year’s Elhan Yarshater Biennial Lecture shall provide a sweeping overview and detailed analysis of the principal fields of jurisprudence in Sasanian Iran (third to seventh centuries CE). The five lectures will be investigating the genesis of legal institutions that were instrumental in consolidating the social status of Sasanian elites, notably, the Zoroastrian clergy and the Iranian aristocracy.

Legal Sources and Instruments of Law
The opening lecture will provide an overview of the available legal material, dispersed in a great variety of sources, and discuss the many pitfalls Iranists encounter in reconstructing the Sasanian legal system.

Kinship Ties and Fictive Alliances
The second lecture examines questions pertaining to Family Law, in particular, the role of kinship ties that are of paramount importance in Sasanian jurisprudence. The lecture also elaborates on the significance of legal institutions within the context of marriage and succession.

Property and Inheritance
The third lecture explores the general concept of property, in particular, the role of kinship ties that are of paramount importance in Sasanian jurisprudence. The lecture also elaborates on the significance of legal institutions within the context of marriage and succession.

Civil and Criminal Proceedings
The fourth lecture reviews the judicial system, the foundation upon which the privileges of the élites were built, and the position of religious minorities, the Jews and Christians, within the framework of the judiciary.

Sasanian Law and other Legal Systems
The final lecture discusses the impact of Iranian law on other important legal systems of the Near East, be it Rabbinic and Nestorian-Christian, or be it Islamic and especially Shi‘ite, law.