

## Central Asian art in the collections of the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge

Dr Firuza Melville, Director of the Cambridge Centre for Persian Studies



Dr Firuza Melville is a graduate (BA, MA honour) of the Faculty of Oriental Studies, St Petersburg University, where she received her PhD in Iranian philology, Art and Islamic Studies. She was an Associate Professor at the University of St Petersburg when she joined the Cambridge Shahnama Project in 2002 after a term at the Institute for Advanced Study (Princeton) and a term at the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor) as a Fulbright Professor. In 2005 she moved to the University of Oxford to teach Persian literature and become a Fellow and Keeper of the Firdousi Library of Wadham College. Since 2013 she is the Director of Research of the Cambridge Shahnama Centre with the focus on Persian and Central Asian Studies, Pembroke College, University of Cambridge.

Her main research interests include Classical Persian literature, debate genre and intertextuality, Russian-Iranian cultural and diplomatic encounters, Islamic book art, Persian literary classics in contemporary art, Russian cultural Orientalism in Iran, Central Asia and the Caucasus, especially in literature, opera and ballet.



Firuza Melville will speak on her research conducted as part of her contribution to the International project 'Uzbek Cultural Legacy in World Collections', where she has been the Project curator of the publications related to the British collections of Central Asian art. She has been the editor-in-chief and contributor of the volume dedicated to the collections of Central Asian art in the Fitzwilliam Museum. She has also written chapters on Central Asian book art for the catalogue of Central Asian art in the British collections with a focus on the artefacts from the British Museum in London,



Ashmolean Museum in Oxford and the Glasgow museums. Her next project is the publication of Central Asian manuscripts in the collections of the Main Library of the University of Cambridge.

In her talk Dr Melville will concentrate on the reconstruction of the so-called Fitzwilliam album, the main part of which is now in Cambridge while the rest of the folia originally produced between Bukhara, Kabul and Delhi are now dispersed across the whole world - between UK, Qatar and US. According to Firuza Melville, the muraqqa' was commissioned as a gift for the young Mughal Emperor Akbar by his mother Queen Hamida Banu Begum. The album assembled in the mid-16th century was kept in the Royal library of the Mughal emperors for centuries until it came to the possession of Percival Manuk, a Cambridge graduate of Armenian descent. Manuk ended up as a Supreme Judge of Patna, being also a passionate art collector who bequeathed his important collection of Western and Oriental art to four British museums. Dr Melville will share her thoughts



Hamida Banu Begum (?) as Angel  
BM, 1948,10,9,053



Young Akbar (?) as Angel  
BM, 1948,10,9,054

about the origins and travels of the album from Bukhara to India and on to England, the concept

behind the virtual reconstruction of the album, i.e. the order of its folia, following the principles of the medieval Islamic Mirror for princes.