The Flaying of Mani: The Hermeneutics of Political Violence in Sasanian Iran

Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina
Bahari Associate Professor of Sasanian Studies, University of Oxford

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 2 | 12:00PM
202 LUCE HALL, 34 HILLHOUSE AVENUE

The prophet Mani and his followers’ cosmopolitanism threatened the highly idealized view of the relationship between priestly and royal power in Sasanian Iran. So much so that the Sasanian kings felt compelled to kill Mani, while their Zoroastrian priestly counterparts felt equally compelled to mock and reject Mani’s claims to being a latter-day Zarathustra. This talk will attempt to demonstrate how the hermeneutical or interpretive tradition in Zoroastrian Middle Persian or Pahlavi literature redacted in the early Islamic period has much to contribute to a richer understanding of Sasanian historiography. It will do so by showcasing how the Manichaeans writing in Parthian, the Zoroastrians producing hermeneutical, legal, and polemical texts in Pahlavi and Pāzand, and the Islamic heresiographers writing in Arabic, all made meaning of the death of Mani at the hands of Bahram I.