

Iván Szántó (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften), “Old images in new skins: the visual tradition of flaying in Iran”

Persian painting abounds in violent imagery. From the grim and monotonous sequence of scenes depicting hanging, stabbing, beheading, stoning, dismemberment, etc., this presentation picks a rare example in which the convicted is flayed alive and then his or her skin is put on display as a memento. Flaying as a punishment is Pre-Islamic in origin and a Sasanian heritage in Islamic legislation. Regardless of time and space it was widely employed across the Islamic world, although its occurrence remained rare, used as an exemplary punishment of extreme crimes. The selected examples suggest that in addition to the practice of flaying itself, the displaying of the stuffed skin can also be observed in Pre-Islamic as well as Islamic times. It is obvious that this form of execution was meant to be more than just a deterrent. Many of those who were flayed and then exhibited must have been punished in this particular way in order to mock their promulgation of idolatry, or *shirk*.