Muslim authors celebrated the Sasanian Dynasty (224-651) as the “golden age” of Persian art and culture. However, few artifacts can be attributed to Sasanian Persia with certainty while direct written sources are very scanty. In the last few years, scholars have found and studied interesting specimens of Sasanian art in Iran. These studies, maintain, in some cases, that our perception of the artistic production of this period should be critically reconsidered.

The Undergraduate Course aims to rethink the question of Sasanian art in light of new studies and discoveries in the field. We will systematically and comprehensively assess our current knowledge on the artistic production and archaeology of the Persian Empire during this period (3rd to 7th centuries CE). Overall, the class will identify more precisely Sasanian cultural features not only in artifacts found in Iran but will also bring into conversation art objects of Persian origin found in other cultural contexts.

The Graduate Course provides recent findings about rock reliefs carved during the Sasanian period in modern Iran. These rock reliefs have attracted the attention of scholars in the field of pre–Islamic Iranian studies for a very long time while many have recently presented innovative ideas. In some cases, Sasanian rock reliefs also contain inscriptions that can further help us understand the historical context and interplay between the Persian Empire and neighboring kingdoms during the 3rd and the 7th centuries CE (above all, the Roman Empire). The seminar will provide a forum wherein students can appreciate, critically engage and understand these unique sculptural remains of a Near–Eastern civilization that once covered a vast territory, transcending contemporary Iran, for more than four centuries and has had a great impact on the cultures and regions of the Caucasus, Central Asia and Northwestern India.