Undergraduate Seminar Syllabus

**Course Overview:** This seminar examines Islam in practice through the prism of empire in Central / South Asia (considered as a single unit), focusing on the eighteenth through early twentieth centuries. In the academic setting, Central and South Asia are usually considered in isolation from one another, but we will examine a cohesive axis of Persophone, Sunni (Hanafi) Islam prevalent in the eastern reaches of the Muslim world roughly from the Kazakh steppe (present-day Russia) to the Deccan (present-day India) going north to south, and from Herat (present-day Afghanistan) to Kashgar (present-day China) going east to west. Similarly, we will transcend the colonial – pre-colonial chronological partition by covering the period from the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth, which will allow us to consider Islam under both Turko-Islamic and European empires while interrogating concepts such as “pre-modern” and the “modern.” Throughout this journey we will examine concepts such as Sufism, inter-religious “syncretism,” orientalism, sharia law, Islamic modernism, and more.

**Assignments and Grading:** The grading breakdown for this course is 20% discussion participation; 20% weekly group forum posts; 20% midterm essay; and 40% final paper.

**Weekly Group Forum Posts:** You are required to post critical responses to the assigned readings on a weekly basis to the appropriate forum on the Courses V2 website. These posts should be roughly 100-200 words in length and must be submitted by midnight the Tuesday before class. The critical responses should consist of two components: (a) At least one question about the reading(s). These can be conceptual discussion questions, points of confusion, or areas where you would like me to offer some expanded context; and (b) a substantive reflection on one or more of the distributed discussion questions, with parenthetical page references where appropriate. You may engage with any reading(s) or question(s) you wish. This requirement will constitute 20% of the final grade (i.e. taking the place of the former presentation assignment).
Midterm Essay: In 4-6 pages you will use the assigned readings to answer one of the questions listed on a handout to be distributed three weeks before the deadline. You do not need to bring in any outside sources. Alternatively, you may write an essay on a topic of your own choosing in consultation with the instructor.

Final Paper: In 15-20 pages you may write either (a) a historiographical essay delving deeper into the secondary literature associated with one of the topics covered in the course; or (b) a research paper engaging in original analysis of primary sources. Both options require additional readings beyond those assigned.

The historiographical essay stands as an exhaustive survey of the extant scholarship on the chosen topic, but it must also be structured around your original argument. What are the major debates in the field? Are there blind spots? Are there any connections ignored by the scholarship itself? In fitting with the theme of this course, your analysis must force scholars into dialogue with one another that are usually separated by artificial divisions within the field, whether those divisions are geographic (Central vs. South Asia) or chronological (early modern vs. colonial era). You are also welcome to follow your own interests and draw such connections outside the areas (e.g. the Ottoman Empire, south India) or times (e.g. the medieval period, or the twentieth century) covered in the assigned readings.

The research paper entails an original argument based on original analysis of primary sources. It would not necessitate extensive additional reading in the secondary literature, though your sources may push you in that direction. This could be English-language colonial sources available in the library. It could also be an opportunity to engage sources (or even a single challenging source) through a foreign language. (The instructor is happy to recommend appropriate sources in an Islamicate language or Russian and read through them during office hours.) In this case the assigned readings would serve as the historiographical backdrop, but the paper should be driven by primary source analysis.

Reference Works: Some of the assigned readings will be difficult to engage without referencing narrative historical works. Depending on prior background, it is highly recommended to have the following works (which are on library reserve) on hand as you engage the literature.

• Narrative history of pre-colonial South Asia: Catherine Asher and Cynthia Talbot, *India before Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).


**Academic Integrity:** For guidelines on what constitutes plagiarism, please see the Yale College Writing Center ([http://writing.yalecollege.yale.edu/advice-students/using-sources/understanding-and-avoiding-plagiarism](http://writing.yalecollege.yale.edu/advice-students/using-sources/understanding-and-avoiding-plagiarism)).

**Statement of Academic Integrity:**

Academic integrity is a core institutional value at Yale. It means, among other things, truth in presentation, diligence and precision in citing works and ideas we have used, and acknowledging our collaborations with others. In view of our commitment to maintaining the highest standards of academic integrity, the Graduate School Code of Conduct specifically prohibits the following forms of behavior: cheating on examinations, problem sets and all other forms of assessment; falsification and/or fabrication of data; plagiarism, that is, the failure in a dissertation, essay or other written exercise to acknowledge ideas, research, or language taken from others; and multiple submission of the same work without obtaining explicit written permission from both instructors before the material is submitted. Students found guilty of violations of academic integrity are subject to one or more of the following penalties: written reprimand, probation, suspension (noted on a student’s transcript) or dismissal (noted on a student’s transcript).
Unit 1 (9/2): Space, Time, and the Blind Spots between Area Studies Divisions

Core Questions: What do we mean by terms such as “Eurasia,” “South Asia,” “Central Asia,” “Persianate”? Where do they come from? What is the genealogy of such terminology?

Suggested Readings:


Further Readings:

• Dhruva Jaishankar, “Does ‘South Asia’ Exist?,” Foreign Policy Blogs, November 26, 2013, southasia.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/11/26/does_south_asia_exist

Unit 2 (9/9): Mongols, Gunpowder Empires, and Situating the “Early Modern”

Core Questions: What did it mean to be a Chinggisid successor state? How can we characterize the Islamic attitude toward Chinggis Khan – and vice versa? Similarities and differences between the so-called “gunpowder empires”? Does the “early modern” chronological unit make sense outside of the European context?
Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:


Unit 3 (9/16): Nadir Shah and the Persianate Empire that Wasn’t

Core Questions: In your view, was Nadir Shah’s short-lived Afsharid Empire the last of the early modern Turkic land empires, or the earliest incarnation of a modern empire? Can we even call it an empire? Did Nadir Shah erect any enduring institutions? What were the geopolitical consequences of his empire? Did Nadir Shah represent an interregnum, or can we speak of a post-Afsharid dispensation? How did Nadir Shah use the state to further his theological agenda?
Required Readings:

- Wolfgang Holzwarth, “Relations between Uzbek Central Asia, the Great Steppe and Iran, 1700-1750,” in *Shifts and Drifts in Nomad-Sedentary Relations*, ed. Stefan Leder and Bernhard Streck (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 2005), 179–216.

Recommended Readings:


Unit 4 (9/23): Orthodoxy, Syncretism, and Other Historiographical Issues

Core Questions: What is the origin of the word “orthodoxy”? Who gets to define what is orthodox? Do you view terms such as “scripturalism,” “orthopraxy,” and “puritanical” as
representative of distinct concepts, or are they essentially synonyms? When does a practice go from being orthodox to syncretic? Can it be both? Was South Asia more syncretic than Central Asia?

Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:


**Unit 5 (9/30): Hanafi Legal Pluralism**

Core Questions: Why was Eurasia so thoroughly Hanafi when all four schools of Islamic law were institutionalized side-by-side in Mamluk Egypt (for instance)? Who appointed a religious official? Who decided whose legal opinion was correct? Was this the same system as the medieval period, or was legal culture still evolving during the early modern period?

Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:


Core Questions: What on earth is Sufism? Mystical poetry? Wandering ascetics? Tightly organized brotherhoods? A kind of philosophy? All of the above? If so, what is the common thread meriting a single term to describe the whole package? Were these different individuals from the ulama encountered in the previous unit? How did they prop up and undermine those in power?

Required Readings:

- Devin DeWeese, “‘Dis-Ordering’ Sufism in Early Modern Central Asia: Suggestions for Rethinking the Sources and Social Structures of Sufi History in the 18th and 19th Centuries,” in *History and Culture of Central Asia*, ed. Bakhtiyar Babadjanov and Kawahara Yayoi (Tokyo: The University of Tokyo, 2012), 259–79.

Recommended Readings:


• Thomas Dahnhardt, Change and Continuity in Indian Sufism: A Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi Branch in the Hindu Environment (D. K. Printworld (P) Ltd., 2002).

• Nile Green, Making Space: Sufis and Settlers in Early Modern India (OUP India, 2012).

Unit 7 (10/14): Persianate Literary High Culture

Core Questions: What were viable literary languages in Central / South Asia? What was it that a native Turkic speaker chose by choosing to compose literature in Persian? What did a native Hindustani speaker choose by choosing to write poetry in Brajbhasha instead of Urdu or Persian? What were the political stakes inherent in these forms of art and literature? How do you understand vernacular language vs. cosmopolitan language?

Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:


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**Recess (Week of October 18): Popular Culture in Hindustan**

Suggested Primary Source Reading:


Similar Tales:


Unit 8 (10/28): Kingship and the State in the Perso-Islamic World

Core Questions: Can we speak of an Islamic theory of governance? What about a Persianate or South Asian one? Were there competing visions of the ideal state, and if so, what determined which one came out on top? How do you understand the concept of “legitimacy”?

Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:

- Bakhtiar Babadzhanov, Kokandskoe Khanstvo: Vlast’, Politika, Religiia (Tokyo - Tashkent: NIHU Program Islamic Area Studies Center at the University of Tokyo (TIAS); Institut Vostokovedeniia Akademii Nauk Respubliki Uzbekistan, 2010).
Unit 9 (11/4): What Kind of Empire? – Colonial and Early Modern Empires in Comparison

Core Questions: Do you see the transition from the eighteenth century into the nineteenth as a story of continuity or disruption? In what respects? What are the stakes of this dispute for historians? Why is this controversy so charged in South Asian studies but nearly absent from Russian studies?

Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:

Unit 10 (11/11): The Impact of Colonialism on Communal Identities

Core Questions: What were the most decisive new colonial administrative technologies in shaping communalism? Which consequences were intended and which were incidental?

Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:


**Unit 11 (11/18): Islamic Modernism**

Core Questions: What sort of category is “Islamic modernism” – retrospective, or did Muslim reformers view themselves as “modern”? What about their opponents? Do you see it as a single transregional movement, or were the various incarnations constitute isomorphisms emerging from similar colonial contexts? What was the relationship between colonialism and these various modernist movements?

**Required Readings:**

• Charles Kurzman, ed. *Modernist Islam, 1840-1940: A Sourcebook*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, Introduction, Ch. 3 (Muhammad Abduh), Ch. 6 (Rashid Rida), Ch. 11 (al-Afghani). (Note: none of these figures are from Central / South Asia; this is intentional.)


**Recommended Readings:**


**Recess (Week of November 22): A Day in the Life of an Islamic Judge**

**Recommended Primary Source Reading:**


**Unit 12 (12/2): City-States, Princely States, and Protectorates**

Core Questions: What is the difference between a princely state and a protectorate, if any? What were the advantages and disadvantages of semi-colonial status? Were local religious elite better off in directly administered territory, or a protectorate? What other gradations of sovereignty are there within an empire?

**Required Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**


**Unit 13 (12/9): Twilight of Empire – The Anti-Imperialist Empire and the Dinosaur**

Core Questions: How would you compare continuity / rupture in the colonial – independent / Soviet transition vis-à-vis the transition from Turko-Islamic empire to European colonialism? What were the respective fates of the different social groups and forms of knowledge examined in previous sections? Manuscript culture? Vernaculars? Ulama? Sufis? Turkic military elite? Are
there differences in how you think about geography (i.e. Eurasia, Persianate, etc.) in this period vs. prior epochs?

Required Readings:


Recommended Readings: