Silk Road to South Asia: a Window on World History

SAST 367-401; NELC 387-401; SAST 667-401; MMES major credit
Meets: M 2-5, Williams Hall, Classroom 3

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Course Introduction:

This course is designed to explore a variety of approaches to world history through the study of Central Asia (to include the post-Soviet Turkic zone as well as Mongolia, Afghanistan, and parts of Pakistan). The course is both an introduction to the history linking Central Asia to the Indian subcontinent, and an introduction to ways of thinking about world history.

The course will begin with an introduction to ideas about human activity in this region. We will explore ways of thinking about mobile peoples, and their political and economic roles which shaped — and linked — polities from the Pacific and Indian Oceans to the Mediterranean, as far back as we know.

After an introduction to the broad geopolitical history of the region, we will ask ourselves: is a story of tribal dynasties, empires, and nation-states the best way to tell the story of Central and South Asia in the larger Eurasian continent? What about the specific lifestyles of the people who formed those geopolitics - how can we conceptualize the social structures of mobile peoples and settled populations over time? Or, how did people negotiate the politics and economics of the Silk Road over time? These are very different types of questions, and we will explore why formulating the question matters so much in world history.

We will go on to explore the politics of mobility and transit, and also blockages of mobility and the rooting of populations. How did Russian and British expansion and consolidation affect Central and South Asia? How does our own history tint the lens through which we view the Soviet period? How do local histories shape experiences of nationality and ethnicity today? Borders may sometimes only be visible on maps, not on the soil; but it is their internalization in people’s consciousness that is most important. How have borders of all sorts – ethnic and sectarian as well as geographic – been created in a zone of remarkable historical mobility?

Finally, if the self-told histories of nations claim root in the culture of their people, should we not examine culture and the mundane features of daily life? Would such a study confirm or deny notions of ethnic (or religious; or national) homogeneity? Undoubtedly we would also find that culture itself has a history, rooted in the politics and economics of daily life. How does people’s lived experience fit into world history? Is a focus on themes like nations and states and ethnic groups as the “central subject” of history warranted? What about things like social mobility, or standards of living, or gender? How do global, regional, and local histories shape each other? And how have people historically narrated their own pasts?

Course Materials and Methods:

In this course, we will critically engage a variety of secondary sources about Central Asia, comparing methodological approaches to interpreting history. At the same time, we will move beyond the narrow world of “non-fiction historical prose,” and discuss how we might engage
diverse literatures outside western traditions of representation. Course participants will actively explore and discuss primary sources such as epic and lyric poetry; early modern Persian-language chronicles; oral literatures; and dialectic philosophical treatises that also embed historiographical visions within themselves. We will inquire into uses of sources as evidence for the historian, but also as dynamic interventions in their original socio-historical contexts.

Readings:

All readings will be supplied via Blackboard.

Recommended: Levi and Sela, eds. Islamic Central Asia: an Anthology of Historical Sources. http://amzn.to/zR4Tpp

Assignments:

Reading:

With the exception of the first week, course participants are responsible for completing all weekly readings before the week indicated, and for being able to discuss the readings in class.

In weeks which have three modules (A, B, C etc.), undergraduate participants may choose any two modules to read. Individuals registered for the graduate section are responsible for all the readings in all modules.

Writing and Speaking:

Course participants will write biweekly (more or less) response papers, 3 pages in length with standard formatting. Responses should deal with any of the readings in depth; and all the readings for the two weeks. Response papers should be submitted electronically, by email to me. We will set aside class time to discuss responses as needed.

There will be a short mid-semester “issues paper” (5 pages), in which participants discuss various approaches to themes introduced in the first half of the course. These papers will contain both a collaborative oral component and a polished, individually written component; I will provide details in class.

There will also be a slightly longer final paper (15 pages) exploring and comparing intellectual approaches to any particular theme, chosen from among the syllabus units. The final paper must include applied reference to any one applicable specific geographical region and period, to be chosen by the student. Students registered for the graduate section will be responsible for writing their paper using primary source materials that were not explicitly discussed during the course of the semester, and for conducting research outside the course materials.

Participation:

Everyone will be receiving a participation grade, based on interaction in the seminar meetings. Attendance is mandatory for all sessions, except in the case of reasonably valid
extenuating circumstances.

Summary of Assignments:

- Responses: 30%
- Attendance/ Participation: 15%
- Midterm: 25%
- Final: 35%

Due Dates:

- 6 February: Response to Readings, Weeks 2-3
- 27 February: Response to Readings, Weeks 4-5
- 19 March: Midterm
- 26 March: Responses to Readings, Weeks 8-9
- 9 April: Responses to Readings, Weeks 10-11
- 26 April: Responses to Readings, Weeks 12-13
- Final: TBA

WEEKLY COURSE UNITS:

Unit 1: Early Geographies; Modern Geopolitics

- Historical Atlas, sections 1-10, 49-50
- Beckwith, “Introduction”, xix-xxv
- Saunders, “A Forgotten Core?” http://www.stonybrook.edu/globality/Articles/no16.html

  Topic A: World History in Literary Imagination: introduction to abstract themes: mobility and power; settlement; the “Historical Period”; stratification vs. egalitarianism; and gender.

  Topic B: Early Geographies, Modern Geopolitics: strategic mobility; resources; geopolitics in the age of terror (seeing jihadism like a state).

** Jan 23 (Please read these selections sometime before the midterm)

Unit 2: Nomads and the State; Aristocratic Orders

- Historical Atlas, sections 11-15

  Topic A: Nomads vs States?
  - Barfield, “Steppe Empires, China, and the Silk Route”, 234-249
  - Wink, “India and the Turko-Mongol Frontier”, 211-233

  Topic B: Nomad States
  - Beckwith, “The Barbarians”, 320-362
  - Beckwith, “The Hero and His Friends”, 1-28

** Jan 30
Unit 3: Trade and Civilization

*Historical Atlas*, sections 15-21

**Topic A:** Linking Trade and Civilizational Identities
Elverskog: “Contact”, 9-55

**Topic B:** Writing Civilization
Levi and Sela 7-9 (Part 1 Introduction); 28-34 (“Hudud al-Alam”); 35-44 (“The Age of Learning”); 47-81 (“Encounters with the Turks”)

**Feb 6 (Response to Weeks 2 and 3)**

Unit 4: Mongols to Timurids

*Historical Atlas*, sections 22-24

Beckwith, “Chinggis Khan and the Mongol Conquests”, 183-203

**Topic A:** Mongols from the Inside
Sneath, “The Headless State”, 181-204

**Topic B:** Mongols from the Outside: Economic or Social History?
Ludden, 42-47 and 61-81

**Feb 13**

Unit 5: Timurid Orders and Beyond: Shrines, States, Aristocrats

*Historical Atlas*, sections 25-28

Levi and Sela, 161-164, 175-180
Beckwith, “Central Eurasians Ride to a European Sea”, 204-231

**Topic A:** Land, Commerce, Islam, Local Independence
Subtelny, “Socioeconomic Bases of Cultural Patronage”, 479-505

**Topic B:** Transregional Warlordism
Ludden, 81-91
Balabanlilar, “Lords of the Auspicious Conjunction”, 1-39

**Feb 20**

Unit 6: Transregionalism and Localism

**Topic A:** Transregional Islam and Local Cultures
Togan, “Fortunate Occasion to Salvation”, 39-48
Foltz, “Central Asian Naqshbandis and South Asian Mughals”, 129-139

**Topic B:** Transregional and Local Political Identities through the 18th century
Green, “Tribe, Diaspora, and Sainthood in Afghan History”, 171-211
Holzwarth, “The Uzbek State in Bukharan Sources”, 93-129
** Feb 27 (Response to Weeks 4-6 Due)

***** Spring Break *****

Unit 7: Mid-Semester Summary

Topic A: Frameworks  
Frank, “The Centrality of Central Asia”, and responses, 43-122  

** Mar 12: Come prepared to discuss your answers to Frank, in light of the field as it has developed since he wrote this field-making essay. This will be part of the midterm.

Unit 8: The Rise of the West; the Rise of the Rich:  
Modern Imperial Encounters

*Historical Atlas*, sections 29-31

Topic A: Geopolitical Narrative: The Great Game  
Fromkin, “The Great Game in Asia”, 936-951

Topic B: Political Economy:  
Beckwith, “The Road is Closed”, 232-262  
Hanifi, “Impoverishing a Colonial Frontier”, 199-218  
Piacentini, “Afghanistan, the Taliban, and the “Great Game”, 81-98

** Mar 19: Midterm Essay Due

Unit 9: Imperial Representations of Power and Resistance; Local Histories

Levi and Sela, 281-305

Topic A: Social Space and Representation in the British Empire  
Bhattacharya, “Predicaments of Mobility”, 163-214  
Anderson, “Poetics and Politics in Ethnographic Texts”, 91-115

Topic B: Social Space and Representation in the Russian Empire  
Brower and Lazzerini, eds. "Introduction", xi-xx  
Gross, "Historical Memory", 203-226  
Martin, "Barīmta: Nomadic Custom, Imperial Crime", 249-270

Topic C: Military Representations then and now  
Edwards, "Mad Mullahs and Englishmen"  
Porter, "Exotic Enemy?", 143-170 in *Military Orientalism*
** Mar 26 (Response to Weeks 8 and 9 due)

** Unit 10: The Soviet Empire

*Historical Atlas*, sections 34-39
Shahrani, “Central Asia and the Challenge of the Soviet Legacy”, 123-135

Topic A: **Writing Political Economy**
Selections from CESR, 1-11

Topic B: **Writing Cultural History**
Atai, “State-Managed Art and Culture”, 109-127

** Apr 2

** Unit 11: Old Identities and New Nationalisms?

*Historical Atlas*, sections 40-46, 48

Topic A: **Theories of Post-Colonialism**
Kandiyoti, “Central Asian and Middle East Post-Colonialisms Compared”, 279-297
Phillips and James, “The Contradictions of Central Asia”, 23-35

Topic B: **Case Studies**
Finke, “Competing Ideologies of Statehood”, 109-128
Centlivres and Centlivres-Demont, “Levels of Identity in Afghanistan”, 419-428

Topic C: **Beneath the Radar of the Nation: Business as Usual**
Markovits, “Global World of Indian Merchants”, 57-109
Leonard, “South Asian Entrepreneurs in Uzbekistan”, 276-289

** Apr 9 (Response to Weeks 10 and 11 due)

** Unit 12: Gender and Power

Sahadeo and Zanca, 85-87 (“Gender”)
Megoran, “Theorizing Gender, Ethnicity, and Nation State”, 99-110

Topic A: **Thinking Systemically**
Uehling, “Dinner with Akhmet”, Sahadeo and Zanca, 127-140
Sancak and Finke, “Konstitutsiya Buzildi!”, Sahadeo and Zanca, 160-177
Kim, “Women's Involvement in Religious Fundamentalism”, 1-20

Topic B: **Thinking Historically**
Sahadeo and Zanca, 89-126.

Topic C: **Alternate Visions from Afghanistan**
Mawlawi Wasi (primary source) + contextual commentary (Caron).
Juan Cole, “Taliban, Women, and Hegelian Public Sphere”, 771-805
Unit 13: Islam in Colonial and Post-Colonial Political Orders

*Historical Atlas, section 47*

**Topic A:** Local traditionalism, local revivalism, state discipline
- Sahadeo & Zanca: 301-304; Chs. 20-22
- Adeeb Khalid, “Nation, State, Religion in Uzbekistan”, 573-598

**Topic B:** Mujahideen and Taliban: Geopolitics or local politics?
- Rubin, “Political Economy of War and Peace”, 1789-1803
- Olivier Roy, “The New Political Elite”, 72-100

**Topic C:** Transnational networks and local conflicts
- Canfield, “Fraternity, Power, and Time”, 212-237
- News Selections, 1-8

**Apr 23 (Response to Weeks 12 and 13 due)**

Unit 14: Histories of the Everyday and Alternative Modes of Historical Representation

**ONLY IF WE WISH TO MAKE UP A MISSING CLASS!**