

REL. 235

# GODS IN TRANSIT: THE SPREAD OF RELIGIONS IN ASIA

Dr. Timothy Lubin

Winter 2007, Washington & Lee University  
23 Newcomb Hall / LubinT@wlu.edu / x8146

## **Course Description:**

This course looks at how deities and religious ideas and practices spread from one place to another through conquest, a network of holy men, or a circuit of traders. The history of religions, from antiquity to the present day, is full of cases of a religion traveling from one place to another. The circumstances vary: it may happen as part of a conquest or colonization, or more peacefully through the work of missionaries or wandering monks, or as a by-product of trade or professional contacts.

Examples will be drawn from the Mediterranean and from Asia, including Hellenistic mysteries, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The aim is to identify (a) the processes that occur when religions travel from one region to another, and (b) the role of these religions in creating new cultures shared across a wide area. The focus is mainly on pre-modern periods, but comparisons will be made, especially toward the end of the course, with religious pluralism and globalization in the modern world. Attention will be given to concepts such as 'syncretism', 'folk traditions' vs. 'high traditions', 'orthodoxy' vs. 'sect', and the formation of canons.

The course employs an interactive method for modeling religious change. Students will choose a particular historical figure, professional role, or social group to represent in a role-playing exercise that will mimic the confluence of factors in an actual historical case of the spread of a religion.

This will require each student to research the figure or group in sufficient depth to be able to represent it in the exercise. This research will take the form of a 'dossier' that documents the historical and cultural background, and the economic and social profile (religious affiliations, status vis-à-vis others, means of livelihood, etc.).

Based on the information compiled in the dossiers, students (either individually or in groups) will reconstruct in class the setting and the interplay of religious ideas and practices with historical events and social dynamics, seeking to identify what made a particular religion appealing, persuasive, or advantageous in a new place or setting.

The Web tool “Blackboard” will be used as a forum in which the various individuals and groups portrayed by individual students can “interact” and “converse” with on another.

All students will complete two such dossiers and presentations, the first from the Silk Road tradition and the second from the Indian Ocean (each 33% of the final grade). There will also be a final examination (33%).

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### **Books for Purchase:**

Richard C. Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road* (Saint Martin’s Press, 1999).

Prods Oktor Skjærvø, *An Introduction to Zoroastrianism* (unpublished; Harvard U., 2006).

Prods Oktor Skjærvø, *An Introduction to Manicheism* (unpublished; Harvard U., 2006).

Hermann Kulke and Dietmar Rothermund, *A History of India* (London: Routledge).

Amitav Ghosh, *In an Antique Land* (Knopf, 1993).

### **Class Schedule (very much subject to change)**

#### **PART ONE — THE SILK ROAD**

##### **Week 1      The Silk Road**

1/8      Introduction to the course

1/10     Foltz, chs. 1-2.

          optional — for additional background on western Asia in antiquity:  
Helmut Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 1, *History, Culture, and Religion in the Hellenistic Age*, pp. 1–16, 31–36, 164–203 (Historical Survey; The Development of Greek Religion; The New Religions).

##### **Week 2      Iran’s Legacy: Zoroastrianism and Mithraism**

1/15     Skjærvø, *An Introduction to Zoroastrianism*, pp. 1–66.

1/17     Skjærvø, selections from Zoroastrian sources.

##### **Week 3      Nestorians and Manichaeans**

1/22     Foltz, ch. 4.

Skjærvø, *An Introduction to Manicheism*, pp. 11–19, 22–64.

- 1/24 RLA, chs. 15 (Acts of Thomas);  
Skjærvø, selections from Manichaean sources.

#### **Week 4 Islam Ascendant and the Quest for “Prester John”**

- 1/29 Foltz, chs. 5–6; selected passages of Qur’an and Hadith.
- 1/31 Foltz, ch. 7;  
Patrick Hatcher, “Peddling Islam: The Merchant in Early Conversion Narratives of the Central Asian Turks” (*Toronto Studies of Central and Inner Asia*).

#### **Week 5 The Buddha, the Mauryan Dharma-King, and the Wandering Monks**

- 2/6 Foltz, ch. 3.  
“The Life of the Buddha.”  
“Edicts of King Asoka” (selected).  
K. R. Norman, “Buddhism and Aśoka,” ch. VII in *A Philological Approach to Buddhism*, rev. ed. (Pali Text Society, 2006), pp. 147–169.
- 2/8 *Mahavamsa (Chronicle of Lanka)* 1.12–43, 11–13, 24–25.

#### **Week 6 Iran’s and China’s Appropriation of Buddhism**

- 2/13 David Alan Scott, “The Iranian Face of Buddhism,” *East and West* n.s. 40 (1990): 43–77.  
David Scott, “Buddhist Responses to Manichaeism,” *History of Religions* 35.2 (1995): 148–162.  
see also: Richard Salomon, *Ancient Buddhist Scrolls from Gandhara* (Seattle/London 1999), esp. chapter 8.  
Wing-tsit Chan, “Transformation of Buddhism in China.”
- 2/15 Kenneth Ch’en, “The Role of Buddhist Monasteries in T’ang China.”  
*Sources of Chinese Tradition*, chs. 15 and 17.  
[The Journey of Faxian to India \(399–414\)](#)  
[Xuanzang’s Record of the Western Regions \(629–645\)](#)  
See also:  
[The International Dunhuang Project](#)  
[Early Buddhist Manuscripts Project](#)

**FIRST DOSSIER DUE FRIDAY AT 5 pm**

## Washington Break (2/17–26)

### PART TWO — THE WORLD OF THE INDIAN OCEAN

#### Week 7 Brahmins, Buddhists, and Greeks

- 2/27 *Periplus Maris Erythraei* ('Voyage around the Erythraean Sea', ca. 60);  
Kulke and Rothermund, pp. 1–70.
- 3/1 Timothy Lubin, "The Transmission, Patronage, and Prestige of Brahmanical Piety from the Mauryas to the Guptas" (2005).

#### Week 8 Royal Temples, Brahmin Settlements, and "Sanskritization."

- 3/6 Kulke and Rothermund, pp. 70–96.  
J. Frits Staal, "Sanskrit and Sanskritization," *Journal of Asian Studies* 22.3: 261–275 (1963).  
Sheldon Pollock, "The Sanskrit Cosmopolis, 300–1300: Transculturation, Vernacularization, and the Question of Ideology," in J.E.M. Houben, ed., *Ideology and Status of Sanskrit* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), pp. 197–247.
- 3/8 Anncharlott Eschmann, "Hinduization of Tribal Deities in Orissa: The Śaiva and Śākta Typology" and "The Vaiṣṇava Typology of Hinduization and the Origin of Jagannātha," chs. 4–5 in Eschmann, Kulke & Tripathi, eds., *The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa* (Delhi: Manohar, 1978), pp. 79–117.  
John Stanley, "The Cult of Khaṇḍobā," in Alf Hiltebeitel, ed., *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989).

#### Week 9 The "Indianization" of Southeast Asia

- 3/13 Kulke and Rothermund, pp. 152–161.  
Coedès, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, chs. 2–4.
- 3/15 Robinson and Johnson, "Buddhism in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia."  
Raymond L. M. Lee and R. Rajoo, "Sanskritization and Indian Ethnicity in Malaysia," *Modern Asian Studies* 21.2 (1987): 389–415.
- In depth:  
Alexis Sanderson, "The Śaiva Religion among the Khmers," *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 90–91 (2003–2004): 349–462.

## Week 10 Islam in India

- 3/20 Y. Friedmann, "Qissat Shakarwati Farmad: A Tradition Concerning the Introduction of Islam to Malabar," *Israel Oriental Studies* 5: 233–245 (1975).  
Selections from the *Chach-Nama [Tarikh-i Hind wa Sind]* in H. M. Elliot and John Dowson, *The History of India as Told by its Own Historians: The Muhammadan Period*, vol. 1 (London: Trubner, 1867), pp. 131–211.  
Bruce Lawrence, "Islam in India: The Function of Institutional Sufism in the Islamization of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Kashmir," *Contributions to Asian Studies* 17: 27–43 (1982).  
optional:  
Y. Friedmann, "The Origins and Significance of the *Chach Nama*," *Islam in Asia, vol. 1: South Asia*, pp. 23–35.  
Aziz Ahmad, pp. 73–100.
- 3/22 A. Embree, ed., *Alberuni's India*, pp. v–xix, I: 3–8, 17–32, 59–124, 228–229; II: 13–14, 145–146, 161–163.  
Y. Friedmann, "Medieval Muslim Views of Indian Religions," *JAOS* 95: 214–221 (1975).  
Richard Eaton, "Approaches to the Study of Conversion to Islam in India," in R. C. Martin, ed., *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies* (Tucson: U. Arizona P., 1985), pp. 106–123.  
Susan Bayly, "The Muslim Religious Tradition in South India," ch. 3 in *Saints, Goddesses and Kings* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P.), pp. 104–150.  
optional:  
Richard Eaton, *The Rise of Islam on the Bengal Frontier*.

## Week 11 Islamization and Christianization of S.E. Asia

- 3/27 Anthony Reid, "Islamization and Christianization in Southeast Asia: the Critical Phase, 1550–1650," in: *Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Era: Trade, Power, and Belief* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press), pp. 151–179.  
David Parkin and Stephen C. Headley, eds., *Islamic Prayer across the Indian Ocean: Inside and Outside the Mosque* (London: Curzon Press, 2001): ch. 1: "Inside and Outside the Mosque: A Master Trope" (David Parkin); ch. 3: "Islamic and Non-Islamic Prayer in Java" (Andrew Beatty).
- 3/29 Parking & Headley, ch. 4: "Localising Islamic Performances in Mayotte" (Michael Lambek); "Sembah/Salat: The Javanisation of Islamic Prayer; the Islamisation of Javanese Prayer" (Stephen Headley).

**SECOND DOSSIER DUE FRIDAY AT 5 pm**

## SYNTHESIS

### Week 12      **Modeling the Movement of Religions**

Syncretization, Sanskritization, Missionization:

4/3      Tony K. Stewart and Carl W. Ernst, "Syncretism," in Mills, Claus, and Diamond, eds., *South Asian Folklore: An Encyclopedia* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 586–588.

Gerardus van der Leeuw, "The Dynamism of Religions, Syncretism, Mission," in Anita Leopold and Jeppe Sinding Jensen, eds., *Syncretism in Religion: A Reader* (London: Equinox, 2004), pp. 98–102.

Roger Bastide, "Problems of Religious Syncretism," in Anita Leopold and Jeppe Sinding Jensen, eds., *Syncretism in Religion: A Reader* (London: Equinox, 2004), pp. 113–139.

Lorraine V. Aragon, "Reorganizing the Cosmology: The Reinterpretation of Deities and Religious Practice by Protestants in Central Sulawesi," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 27.2: 350–373 (1996).

The Global Marketplace of Religion, Yesterday and Today:

4/5      Jeff Haynes, "Introduction," and Scott Thomas, "Religion and International Society," in Jeff Haynes, ed., *Religion, Globalization and Political Culture in the Third World* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), pp. 3–44.

Lois Ann Lorentzen, "Who Is an Indian? Religion, Globalization, and Chiapas," in Dwight N. Hopkins, et al., eds., *Religions/Globalizations: Theories and Cases* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 84–103.

## FINAL EXAM

### Recommended Web Resources

[Silk Road Seattle](#)

[Silk Road Narratives: A Collection of Historical Texts, including:](#)

[Periplus Maris Erythraei \('Voyage around the Erythraean Sea', ca. 60\)](#)

[The Journey of Faxian to India \(399-414\)](#)

[Xuanzang's Record of the Western Regions \(629-645\)](#)

[William of Rubruck's Account of the Mongols \(1253-55\)](#)

[The International Dunhuang Project](#)

[Early Buddhist Manuscripts Project](#)

[Silkroad Foundation](#)

[Religion and Society in the Indian Ocean World \(UCLA\)](#)

[Indus Valley \(Harappa.com\)](#)