

MESA 2300, Crossing Borders: Middle East & South Asia

Faculty: Richard J. Cohen

Time & Place: MTWTRF, 10:30 – 12:45, Room 330, Bryan Hall

Office Hours: Wednesday: 2 – 5pm, Room 136, New Cabell Hall

The main goal of this course is to question and problematize how we think historically about the Middle East and South Asia as a region. Their relationship to the West (Europe), Africa (especially East Africa), Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia) and East Asia (China) will come into play as well. A fundamental assumption of the course is that the contemporary global configuration of nation-states, as well as the configuration of academic disciplines in the university, disguise, even occlude deep historical connections that have resulted in the complex racial, cultural, linguistic, economic and religious hybridities that today constitute the two regions. Hence, the goal of this course is to recover and highlight those principle elements of culture, language, literature, religion, and most exceptionally trade, that constitute the shared experience of the two regions.

The course fulfills the Non-Western requirement. Prof. Cohen will accept the form for the fulfillment of the Second Writing Requirement at the end of the course.

We begin with the ME's and SA's contributions to the earliest attempts at organized agriculture and city-based societies, ca. 7000 – 2000 BCE. Both regions have played an enormous role in the creation of literary societies and writing systems which have periodically influenced one another. Tracing the development and influences of such languages as Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit and South Asian regional languages, and their literatures, is a core focus of the course. Literature and literary genres have crisscrossed the two regions over centuries, mutually influencing one another. The Middle East functioned as “editor and messenger” of many South Asian cultural and technological concepts, ultimately impacting intellectual developments in the West. The development of Islam in the Middle East and its influences on South Asian religion, language and culture will be highlighted, as will the function of extensive trade networks over land and water which served as life-lines of communication between the two regions.

The effects of colonialism and the reaction to it in Asia (here including the Middle East, South Asia and East Asia) will be highlighted through a reading of Pankaj Mishra's recently published book, *From the Ruins of Empire: The Revolt Against the West and the Remaking of Asia*—a book that attempts to explain, with a refreshing new approach, the behind the scenes actions of several key intellectuals from the Middle East, South Asia and East Asia who resisted colonialism, and who augured the upheavals that were to follow.

Another primary aim of this course is three-fold. **Number one**, it should improve how you research and analyze other cultures and their histories. We will be coping with how to understand two cultures which are **very different** from the culture of the western academy in which we are situated. **Number two**, it aims to improve your writing skills-- grammar, rhetoric, composition, presentation and argumentation. In other words, how effective are you at expressing your thoughts on the various foci of this course. And finally, **number three**, and by no means the least relevant, how will you improve oral presentation and argumentation of your ideas, on whatever subject is at hand. You should be able to participate, **hold your own** so to speak, with the group. Prepare yourself, before you open your mouth, apply the pen to paper, or touch the keyboard with your fingertips.

The best way to proceed is to open yourself up to criticism. Therefore, there will be opportunities for you to learn from criticism while composing the two longer papers we will write in this course: the first long paper (2,000 words) will be an opportunity for you to subject yourself to a two-step process, by way of writing a paper that I will critique and grade, after which you will have an opportunity to revise it, if you so choose; the second long paper (2,000 words) will be critiqued by one of your peer, after which the paper will be due in two days at the last class of the semester. Both papers are to be **research-type compositions**, in which you do independent work on a particular subject. In addition to the two long papers, there are four response papers (350 words) that you will write in reaction to a reading assigned for class.

Requirements and Grading:

2 papers: 2,000 word length (30% of final grade), 4 response papers of 350 words each (20%), attendance (25% of final grade), participation (25% of final grade). Please note: one un-excused absence and one excused absence will be tolerated. More than that, your attendance grade will be affected.

Grade thresholds are as follows:

98 – 100 (A+), 95 – 97.99 (A), 91 – 94.99 (A-), 87.5 – 90.99 (B+), 83.5 – 87.4 (B), 81 – 83.4 (B-), 77.5 – 80.99 (C+), 73.5 – 77.4 (C), 71 – 73.4 (C-), 67.5 – 70.99 (D+), 63.5 – 67.4 (D), 61 – 63.4 (D-), 60.99 or less (F).

Please note that the grade of A minus (A-) begins at 91%.

Evaluation and grading of the two research papers and four response papers will be based on the “Grading Rubric” posted on the Collab site, in the top level folder in the “Resources” link.

Books to be Purchased:

- Sheriff, Abdul. *Dhow Cultures of the Indian Ocean: Cosmopolitanism, Commerce and Islam*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010
- Mishra, Pankaj, *From the Ruins of Empire: The Revolt Against the West and the Remaking of Asia*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012

In addition to the above items, there will be required readings, as well as “further readings for those interested,” posted on the Collab site.

MESA2300 Summer 2016 Schedule

Week of July 11

11: introduction to the course syllabus and readings; lay of the land: geographic and climatic realities of the Middle East, South Asia, East African coast and Indian Ocean, and the role they have played in their individual cultures. Review the many maps and graphics loaded on the course Collab site. I will be displaying these maps/graphics. Be ready to engage these topics for discussion in class.

12: the Persian Gulf (or, Arabian Gulf, according to your politics!!!) in history; **read** Potter "Introduction," p 1 – 24. We will discuss the special character of the societies that live on the Gulf littoral, the *khaliji* culture or society. Why is the Gulf so special relative to the histories of the Middle East and South Asia? It remains crucially important in our contemporary world. Who are the states today in the so-called "Persian Gulf" that figure so prominently in the politics and economy of our world?

13: the role of the so-called "Fertile Crescent" in the development of SEDENTARY human society; **read** Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*, p 85 – 191, available on Collab. Get ready to EXPRESS your newly formed awareness of the important role the domestication of plants and animals made in the formation of "settled" society, and that it happened in the MIDDLE EAST!

I want to hear from you! Where is your understanding on this important matter? Why and where did the domestication of certain plants and animals occur when they did? And what long term effect have they had on us today?

14: Discussion of the article "Dynamics of Trade in the Ancient Mesopotamian 'World System'" by Christopher Edens, available on Collab. Discussion of pp 1 – 36 of the book by Sheriff: *Dhow Cultures of the Indian Ocean*. **1st response paper due. Think about it and be prepared to air your ideas and opinions!**

15: The language families of the Middle East, South Asia and East Africa.

Week of July 18

18: Discussion of the origin of writing. Read: "How Writing Came About" by Denise Schmandt-Besserat on Collab. Discussion around the article "Gulf Society: An Anthropological View of the *Khalijis* – Their Evolution and Way of Life" in *The Persian Gulf in History*, p 147 – 162.

19: The basis of Indic and Iranian civilizations as witnessed by the Vedas and the Avesta. Reading on Collab. Discussion around "The Persian Gulf in Late Antiquity: The Sassanian Era (200 – 700 CE)" in *The Persian Gulf in History*, p 57 – 70. **Second response paper due.**

20: Discussion of pp 37 – 73 by the book by Sheriff. The advent of Islam, Muhammad the Last Prophet of the Abrahamic God, and the Impact of the Qur'an.

21: Discussion around p 3 – 98 from the book *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* by Annemarie Schimmel. See Collab for the reading.

22: **First research paper due on Collab (2,000 words)**. : Discussion of pp 79 – 150 of the book by Sheriff.

Week of July 25

25: . Discussion around p 187 – 227 from the book *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* by Annemarie Schimmel. See Collab for the reading. A discussion on the role of Sufism in the acceptance of Islam in South Asia. See Collab for readings and materials.

26: Discussion around p 151 – 216 of the book by Sheriff. Discuss “The Ottoman Role in the Gulf” in *The Persian Gulf in History*, p 261– 276, and “Introduction to the Ottoman Empire” to be found in Collab.

27: **Third response paper due.** Discussion around p 217 – 261 of book by Sheriff.

28: Discussion around p 263 – 319 of book by Sheriff.

29: Readings from Bose: *A Hundred Horizons*, on Collab in “Resources” in the “Europeans in the Indian Ocean” folder.

Week of August 1

1: Begin our discussions of Pankaj Mishra’s book *From the Ruins of Empire: The Revolt Against the West and the Remaking of Asia*. **Continue through the rest of the class meetings.** ↓

2: **Fourth response paper due.**

3:

4: **Send your second research paper (2,000 words) to the designated class peer for comment.**

5: **Second research paper due (2,000 words).**