

Fall 2008  
Office Hours: Mon. 11:00-12:00,  
Wed. 4:00-5:00, and by appt.  
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H. Hogan  
Rice 313

FYSP 159  
Historical Perspectives on Contemporary Central Asia  
Silk Roads and Great Games

The late 19<sup>th</sup> c. adventurer Ferdinand von Richthofen coined the evocative term “Silk Road” to describe the old trans-Asian trade networks which had once connected the Mediterranean to China. Richthofen was but one of many European explorers and entrepreneurs, philologists and ethnographers, army officers, surveyors and civil officials engaged in a many-faceted imperialist venture in Central Asia. Although it was described by Richthofen in exotic terms, most Europeans had come to view this region as “backward” and “stagnant,” ripe for the “civilizing missions” of Westerners. George Nathaniel Curzon framed the region in somewhat different terms: “Turkestan, Afghanistan, Transcaspia, Persia ... To me, I confess, they are the pieces on a chessboard upon which is being played out a game for the dominion of the world.” Often sensationalized as the “Great Game,” the principle “players” in this deadly serious 19<sup>th</sup> c. colonial enterprise were Imperial Russia and Great Britain. This course will explore the “game” in its 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century variants: the pursuit of power and territory engaged by these imperial powers in the 19<sup>th</sup> c.; the discourses that have sought to normalize imperial interventions; the construction of often artificial nation-states and republics in the region in the post-World War I period; the 20<sup>th</sup> c. variant of the “game” between the Soviet Union and the United States in Afghanistan in the period of the Cold War; and an examination of the legacies of these conflicts in Central Asia in the late 20<sup>th</sup> c. Throughout the semester we will be exploring the relationship between local political and economic structures and belief systems, and the ways imperial powers and modernizing “imperatives” have interacted. Toward the end of the semester we will discuss the emergence of Islam as a powerful political force and some of the social and economic consequences of the instability in the region over the last few decades.

Course Objectives and Requirements

The fundamental project of the seminar will be the development of an intellectual community in which we all work together to reach an understanding of an historical problem with important contemporary resonance. It will be the responsibility of each member of the seminar to bring his/her ideas and perspectives to the metaphorical table. Attendance is mandatory and active participation in discussion is expected.

In looking variously at the social, political, economic and cultural conflicts in the region in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> c. this seminar seeks to develop a range of skills central to historical thinking and the project of liberal education more generally: learning to think in context – that is, making relevant comparisons, excluding extraneous information or anachronistic concepts, evaluating long-term continuities; becoming accustomed to gray areas; dealing with complexity; and testing

generalizations. The seminar also seeks to develop critical thinking skills through a close reading of primary texts and secondary works; the regular exchange of ideas in oral form; the practice of various types of exploratory writing; and the process of defining a research topic and finding appropriate materials to conduct research.

We will have several different types of writing assignments:

For many sessions (indicated on the syllabus) I will ask you to post to Blackboard 2-3 questions focused on the reading assigned for the day. These will be due by 9 am on the day the class meets. Your questions should be of an interpretative nature, rather than ask simple questions of fact. They should be questions that you really do intend to pose. What is interesting, or confusing, or problematic in the author's presentation of information and assertion; what is his/her point of view? What does s/he want you to believe about a particular issue? These questions should help you participate in the discussion and should also focus your reading so as to develop close and critical reading skills. Your questions and participation in discussion will constitute 40% of the grade.

The remainder of the grade will be composed as follows:

- Geography Quiz = 5% of the grade.
- Primary Document Analysis = 5% of the grade.
  - Due Friday, Sept. 19 by noon
- Essays #1 and #2 = 15% each.
  - Essay #1 due Friday, Oct. 17 by noon;
  - Essay #2 due Friday, Nov. 7 by noon
- Annotated bibliography and short oral presentation = 20% of the grade.
  - one paragraph statement of research topic -Nov. 14, by noon
  - oral presentations: Dec. 3, 8, 10
  - final due date: Dec 12.

Credit for the course will not be given if all written work is not turned in.

Attendance is mandatory. Students must attend every session of the seminar or present a valid excuse to the instructor

I have ordered two books for purchase at the College Bookstore (they are also on regular reserve).

- A. Khalid, The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform
- D. Edwards, Heroes of the Age

The syllabus, the assignments, and some course materials are posted on the course Blackboard site; all other materials will be available on ERes or as handouts.

Your written assignments and analytic bibliography are governed by the Honor code. Please read the honor code, found at <http://www.oberlin.edu/students/links-life/honorcode.html>

Remember to sign the Honor pledge on your assignments: "I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment."

A final note: Please turn off cell phones, pagers, beeping watches and the like for the entire class period; please get to class on time and once class has begun refrain from taking breaks and leaving the room.

### Wednesday, Sept. 3: Introduction

Monday, Sept. 8: Where are we? The Natural Setting and the Subjectivities of Geography  
What are the multiple ways to think about this region? How is it defined and by whom?

Forum #1: Read and post questions on:

McChesney, Central Asia: Foundations of Change, pp. 15-37 [Eres]

Roy, The New Central Asia , pp. 1-2 [Eres]

Lewis and Wigen, "Introduction" in The Myth of Continents, pp. 1-19 [Bb]

Spend some time working with the maps and getting comfortable with the geography

<http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/maps/maps.html>

Go to: "Cultures and Empires" then India and Central Asia then Timur's empire I and II

Go to "Physical Geography" then Topography of Western Asia

<http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/maps/mapquiz/mapquiz.html>

Do the interactive quizzes:

Regions

Cities of the Silk Road

Water and Mountains – West

Go to the course Blackboard site. Under 'Course documents' look at additional maps posted there.

### Wednesday, Sept. 10 Central Asian Political Traditions

Forum #2: Read and post questions on:

Roy, The New Central Asia , pp. 2-10 [Eres]

Manz, "Historical Background" in Central Asia in Historical Perspective \_pp. 4-12.  
[Handout]

McChesney, Central Asia: Foundations of Change, pp. 119-141 [Eres]

### Monday, Sept. 15 The Great Game

Reading popular history and scholarly history – what should we look out for? What makes a scholarly study, scholarly? What is a monograph?

As part of this assignment please go to the library and look at a hard copy of Meyer (on reserve) and bring to class either Khalid or Edwards.

Forum #3: Read and post questions on:

Hopkirk “Prologue” and “The Beginnings” in The Great Game, The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia, p.1-23 [Handout]

Meyer , “Prologue” Tournament of shadows : the great game and race for empire In Central Asia, xii-xxv [Handout]

Fromkin, A Peace To End All Peace, pp. 26-32 [Eres]

### Wednesday, Sept .17 The Great Game

Assessing primary documents –what’s the difference between a primary and secondary source? How do we ‘read between the lines’ of a primary document?

Draft a few paragraphs of what will become your document analysis and bring your draft to class.

The 1864 Gorchakov Memorandum [Handout]

Curzon, Russia in Central Asia in 1889 and the Anglo-Russian question, pp. 313-322 [Eres]

### **Assignment #1 –document analysis -due Friday, Sept. 19 by noon**

#### Monday, Sept. 22 Colonial society in Russian Turkistan

Critical reading: What sort of clues can we look for to help identify author argument? What are the major questions or problems Khalid wants to address and what sorts of evidence does he rely on to support his claims? [Khalid is an historian; I will ask the same questions of Edwards, an anthropologist]

Forum #4: Read and post questions on  
Khalid, The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform  
Introduction and Ch 1 (pp. 1- 44)

#### Wednesday, Sept. 24 Visual Representations of Central Asian society

Assessing visual documents –how do images shape our understanding of other cultures? Other times?

Meet at Allen Art Museum for session with Ms. Crossman

#### Monday, Sept. 29 Colonial society in Russian Turkistan

Forum #5: Read and post questions on  
Khalid, The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform Ch 2 (pp. 45-79)

Wednesday, Oct. 1 Afghan society in the late 19<sup>th</sup> c.

What are the major questions or problems Edwards wants to address and what sorts of evidence does he rely on to support his claims? In what ways do the disciplines of history and anthropology differ in their methods?

Forum #6: Read and post questions on  
Edwards, Heroes of the Age, pp. 1-77

Monday, Oct 6 Afghan society in the late 19<sup>th</sup> c.

Forum #7: Read and post questions on  
Edwards, Heroes of the Age, pp 78-171

Wednesday, Oct. 8 Mad Mullahs and Englishman

Forum #8: Read and post questions on  
Edwards, Heroes of the Age, pp 172-234

Monday, Oct. 13 Writing Workshop on Heroes paper

Wednesday, Oct. 15 Summing up – Central Asia at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.

**Essay #1 - due Friday, Oct. 17 by noon**

Break Week

Monday, Oct. 27 The Chaos of World War I; Imperial collapse, anti-colonialism and state-building --- A mini lecture on a large topic.

Dmytryshyn, The Soviet Union and the Middle East, A Documentary Record of Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey, 1917-1985, pp. 3-15. [Eres]

Wednesday, Oct. 29 Bolshevism and Modernizing imperatives

Assessing difficult and contradictory arguments: Hirsch vs. Roy

Hirsch, "Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of Soviet National Identities" in Russian Review 59 (April 2000):201-26 [Eres]

Monday, Nov. 3 Bolshevism and Modernizing imperatives

Bring draft of Hirsh paper to class

Roy The New Central Asia , Ch 4 [Eres]

Wednesday, Nov. 5 Bolshevism and Modernizing imperatives

Turksib [60 minutes] --- assessing a visual document

**Essay #2 - due Friday, Nov. 7 by noon**

Monday, Nov. 10 Research methods

Individual consultations on topics for analytic bibliography

Wednesday, Nov. 12 Research methods

Library session in Science library computer lab with Mr. Li

**Write up one paragraph statement of research topic/ problem to be explored – due no later than noon, Nov. 14**

Monday, Nov. 17 Afghanistan, Problems of state-formation

Forum #9: Read and post questions on

Rubin, The Fragmentation of Afghanistan, Ch 3, [pp. 45-80] [Eres]

Wednesday, Nov. 19 The Soviet intervention

Forum #10: Read and post questions on:

Dobrynin, In Confidence, pp. 434-454 [Eres]

--Transcript of CPSU CC Politburo Discussions on Afghanistan, 17-19 March 1979

--Soviet Policy in Afghanistan, 1979: A Grim Assessment: April 12, 1979 report to CC CPSU

-- Andropov-Gromyko-Ustinov-Ponomarev Report on Events in Afghanistan on 27-28 December 1979, dated 31 December 1979

Monday, Nov. 24 The American response

Forum #11: Read and post questions on

Vance, Hard choices, pp. 384-397. [Eres]

Brzezinski, Power and Principle, pp. 426-437 [Eres]

Wednesday, Nov. 26 Thanksgiving is the next day/ let's celebrate a tad early

Monday, Dec. 1 The Ugly Aftermath in Afghanistan

Rubin, The Fragmentation of Afghanistan, Preface, pp. ix-xxxv.[Eres]

Wednesday, Dec. 3 Research presentations

Monday, Dec. 8 Research presentations

Wednesday, Dec. 10 Research presentations

**Annotated bibliography assignment due Dec. 12**