

SYLLABUS HISTORY 463/857, Seminar Topics in South Asian History, 3 credits

EMPIRES OF THE EAST

SPRING 2015-2016

1:20-3:20 W 5255 Mosse Humanities Building (MHB)

Professor André Wink

Office hours: 3:00-4:00 TR (any other time of the week by appointment)

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Course requirements: attendance of the weekly seminars, weekly readings, viewing of documentaries, participation in discussions, at least one short in-class presentation, one mid-term writing assignment (take home essay questions March 16- 25) and a final writing assignment (take home essay questions May 4-11)

Subject of the seminar

“The impulse that drew an Alexander, a Timur, and a Baber eastwards to the Indus was the same that in the sixteenth century gave the Portuguese that brief lease of sovereignty whose outworn shibboleths they have ever since continued to mumble; that early in the last century made a Shah of Persia for ten years the arbiter of the East, that all but gave to France the empire which stouter hearts and a more propitious star have conferred upon our own people; that to this day stirs the ambition and quickens the pulses of the Colossus of the North.”

Curzon, *Persia*

and the Persian Question (1892)

Recent events in South Asia and the Middle East— from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 to the development of global jihadism or “terrorism” and the rise of Osama bin Laden and the Taliban, as well as the so-called Islamic State (ISIS or ISIL) — have taken almost everyone by surprise. They have also sparked a new and intense interest in the historical evolution of a region that until recently most Americans were quite unfamiliar with and regarded as of little relevance for themselves. In the daily press, in foreign policy journals, and in academic books on the subject, what is now often called the “new great game” for empire became a hotly debated subject. Parallels have been drawn between the Cold War engagements of recent decades and the nineteenth-century contest between Russia and Great Britain for power and influence in the same region. As the above quotation from Lord George Nathaniel Curzon [1859-1925; Viceroy of India,

1899-1905) illustrates, the struggle for empire in South Asia and the Middle East has been depicted as something that was historically inevitable and of all ages — proof, if any were needed, of the old adage that “geography is destiny.” But where does this inevitability come from? And what does it bode for the future of the region? Will America, now that it has been drawn into it, be just another, the latest, empire to become “the arbiter of the East”? In this seminar we will explore these, and related issues in five parts.

I. Geography and history

January 20, 27, February 3

Required reading: A. Wink, 'From the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean: Medieval History in Geographic Perspective,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 44, 3 (2002), pp. 416-445.

II. The rise of Islam and the Turko-Mongol empires

February 10, 17, 24

Required reading: A. J. Silverstein, *Islamic History: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2010), introduction, chapters 1-2; A. Wink, *Akbar* (Oxford, 2008).

View: YouTube — “In the footsteps of Marco Polo” (1.5 hour)

III. The Indian Ocean and global trade

March 2, 9, 16

Required reading: K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge, 1985), chapters 1-5.

[March 16-25: mid-term writing assignment on essay questions relating to parts I-III]

IV. Modern imperialism and the Great Game

March 30, April 6, 13

Required reading: D. K. Fieldhouse, *The Colonial Empires: A Comparative Survey from the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1966), chapter 12, pp. 271-286 (handout); D. Fromkin, 'The

Great Game in Asia,' *Foreign Affairs* (Spring, 1980); J. M. Brown,'South Asia,' in: M. Howard and Wm. Roger Louis (eds), *The Oxford History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 240-252 (handout); K. E. Meyer, *The Dust of Empire: The Race for Mastery in the Asian Heartland* (New York, 2003), chapters 1-5 (skip pp. 85-89).

View: YouTube — "The fall of the British empire, Parts 1-3" (appr. 3 hours)

V. The rise of Asia: Turkey, Iran, India, and China in the 21st century

April 20, 27, May 4

Required reading: S. Kinzer, *Reset: Iran, Turkey, and America's Future* (New York, 2010); M. Jacques, *When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order* (London, 2009), chapters 1 & 12; R. D. Kaplan, *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power* (New York, 2010).

[May 4-11: final writing assignment on essay questions relating to parts IV-V]