

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

THE INDO-ISLAMIC WORLD: GEOGRAPHY, HISTORY AND EMPIRES

FALL 2008-2009

1:20-3:20 W 5245 Mosse Humanities Building

Professor André Wink

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Course requirements: attendance of the seminar and one mid-term and final exam (dates tba)

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 – 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 – 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 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 four parts.

I. Geography and history

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

II. The Turko-Mongol empires

Required reading: D. Morgan, *The Mongols* (Oxford, 2007); B. Gascoigne, *The Great Moghuls* (London, 1987); A. Wink, *Akbar* (Oxford, 2008).

III. The Indian Ocean and global trade

Required reading: P. Lunde, ‘The Indian Ocean and Global Trade,’ *Saudi Aramco World*, July/August 2005.

IV. Modern imperialism and the Great Game

P. Hopkirk, *The Great Game: the Struggle for Empire in Central Asia* (New York, 1992); K. E. Meyer, *The Dust of Empire: The Race for Mastery in the Asian Heartland* (New York, 2003).