**HIS-3538**

**Empires, Nomads and Barbarians**

**Teacher: Professor Upinder Singh**

**Course overview:**

This course will approach the history of ancient India within wider global and comparative frames. It will use primary sources -- textual, archaeological, epigraphic, numismatic and visual – to explore networks of political, economic, religious and intellectual interaction across Asia, Europe and Africa. What was the nature and outreach of the Achaemenid empire of Iran? Was the invasion of Alexander a minor episode in Indian history? How did the life of the Macedonian conqueror become the stuff of legend? How did the Hellenistic kingdoms interface with the Mauryas? What was the cultural impact of the Indo-Greeks, Indo-Scythians, Indo-Parthians, and Kushanas? How did the Gupta empire interface with the Hunas and Sasanids? Apart from addressing such questions, the course will discuss the evolution of overland and maritime international trade circuits and trade in commodities such as silk, spices and wine. It will explore the travels of Buddhism, reflected in the journeys of Faxian and Xuanzang and the emergence of renowned centres of monasticism and pilgrimage such as Nalanda and Bodh Gaya. It will also examine the travels and localization of Hinduism and Buddhism in Southeast Asian courts. Drawing on anthropological and historical debates related to states, empires, nomads, frontiers and borderlands, the course will explore themes such as the role of migration and nomadism in history, how cultural others become ‘barbarians,’ what happens when barbarians become rulers, and the dynamic syntheses that occur when cultures meet.

**Learning outcomes:**

Students will understand the interconnections between different parts of the ancient world, and the value of a comparative historical perspective.

**Grading rubric:**

The following percentages will constitute your final grade:

Discussion of week-by-week readings and topics in class: 25%; mid-semester presentation (oral presentation accompanied by submission of written text) 25%; End of semester essay: 50%.

**Students are required to pass in all three of these segments in order to pass this course.**

**Attendance requirements**

**Attending lectures is mandatory.** More than 5 absences without any reason can lead to you failing the course.

**Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is a crime. Your work should be your work. Submission of plagiarized work can lead to your failing the course.

**Syllabus**

Minor changes may be made in in the syllabus outline during the course of the semester.

**Readings**

Many of the readings are available in the library and some will also be available as PDFs via email and/or the AMS (Academic Management System).

Specific readings will be circulated each week for discussion in class.

**Office Hours**: Monday, Wednesday, 1.30-3 pm. Students should send an email in advance to fix an appointment.

**Course Outline**

1. **Introduction**

* Recent perspectives on states, empires, nomads, frontiers and borderlands; Eurasian interactions beyond trade; looking beyond ‘foreign influence’ at migration, cultural interactions and confluence as part of history; the centrality of Central Asia
* The prehistoric and protohistoric connections of the Indian subcontinent; the *Rig Veda* and the *Avesta*
* The advent of the early historic in India
* The idea of the barbarian across cultures

1. **The Persian empire**

* The nature, ideology and legacy of the Persian empire
* The Persian invasions of northwestern India; nature of Persian control
* India and Indians in Persian sources
* The Achaemenids in Iranian (and Greek) history, memory and legend

1. **Alexander and after: early Greek encounters with India**

* Greek ideas of Asia and Europe, Hellenes and barbarians
* Alexander’s invasion of India; the Hellenistic kingdoms
* Elephants and naked philosophers: India in early Greek sources
* Alexander in Eurasian legend

1. **The Maurya empire in a larger geo-political frame**

* The Mauryas and the Seleucids
* Chandragupta and Ashoka in history and legend
* Finding Pataliputra
* Moving beyond the debate on Achaemenid influence

1. **Between the empires: invaders and cultural confluence**

* The Indo-Greeks; Scythians versus Satavahanas; Parthians
* From Yuehzhi to Kushanas
* Evidence from Ai-Khanoum, Taxila, Mathura
* Shakas, Yavanas and Pahlavas in Indian texts and inscriptions

1. **The Gupta empire and its enemies**

* The geo-political world of the Allahabad *prashasti*
* The Hunas, Sasanids and the end of the Gupta empire
* The evolution of the idea of the *mlechchha*

1. **Beyond politics: spices, silk and wine**

* The evolution of overland and maritime trade routes
* ‘Indo-Roman’ trade
* The northern and southern ‘silk roads’
* Evidence from Begram, Berenike, Socotra, Arikamedu, Pattanam

**8. Beyond trade: the travels of religions and ideas**

* Gandhara as a cultural crossroad
* Travelling monks and Buddhist cosmopolitanism: Faxian and Xuanxang; Bodh Gaya and Nalanda
* Hinduism and Buddhism in Southeast Asian courts
* The travels and transformations of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*
* Intellectual interactions across Asia and Europe

**General readings:**

**(N. B.: Weekly readings to be discussed in class will be circulated separately)**

Boussac, Marie-Francoise and Salles, Jean-Francois eds. *Athens, Aden, Arikamedu: Essays on the interrelations between India, Arabia and the Eastern Mediterranean*. New Delhi, Manohar, 2005.

Brosius, Maria. *The Persians: An introduction*, London and New York, Routledge, 2012.

Chakravarti, Ranabir. *The Pull Towards the Coast and Other Essays: The Indian Ocean History and the Subcontinent before 1500 CE*. New Delhi, Primus, 2020.

Daryaee, Touraj. *The Oxford Handbook of Iranian History*, Oxford OUP, 2012.

Frankopan, Peter. *The Silk Roads: A New History of the World*. London, Bloomsbury, 2015.

Glover, Ian and Peter Bellwood (eds.) *Southeast Asia: From Prehistory to History*.

Green, Peter. *Alexander of Macedon, 356-323 BC: a historical biography*. Berkeley, University of California Press, [1991] 2013.

Hansen, Valerie. *Silk Road: a new history*. Oxford, OUP, 2012.

Karttunen, Klauss. *India and the Hellenistic world*. Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 2017.

Karttunen, Klauss. *India in Early Greek Literature.*

Kosmin, Paul J. *The Land of the Elephant Kings: Space, Territory, and Ideology in the Seleucid Empire*. Cambridge MA: HUP, 2014.

Kuhrt, Amélie, ed. *The Persian Empire: A corpus of Sources from the Achaemenid Period*, Oxon, Routledge [2007] 2010.

Liu, Xinriu. *The silk road in world history*, New Delhi, OUP, 2010.

Mukund, Kanakalatha, *The trading world of the Tamil merchant*.

Parker, Grant. *The Making of Roman India*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Potts, D. T. eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Iran*. New York, OUP, 2013.

Ray, H. P. and Daniel T. Potts eds. *Memory as History: The Legacy of Alexander in Asia*. New Delhi, Aryan Books International, 2007

Ray, Himanshu Prabha and Salles, Jean-Francois eds. *Tradition and Archaeology: Early Mediterranean Contacts in the Indian Ocean*. New Delhi, Manohar, [1996] 2012.

Tomber, Roberta, *Indo-Roman Trade: From Pots to Pepper*. London, Bristol Classical Press, 2012.

Wick, Peter and Rabens, Volker eds. *Religions and Trade: Religious Formation, Transformation and Cross-cultural Exchange between East and West*. Leiden, Boston, 2014.