

HIST 301 or IP 300: HISTORY OF EARLY INDIA.

SPECIAL TOPIC: INDIA IN THE GLOBAL CLASSICAL WORLD.

Writing Intensive



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Description:

The aim of this course is to understand material processes and cultural form in the “classical world” broadly conceived as encompassing an area stretching from both the northern and southern parts of South Asia and the Iranian world, to Greece and Rome. We study shared heritage and a process of protracted interaction, alongside cultural contrasts that are often parallel even when they are not similar, over vast stretches of time and space, but focusing on the period of greatest cross-fertilization so that we can enjoy the resources which Florence offers us to the maximum, in terms of museums and local specialists for guest lectures and field trips.

We read the best history writing on the period, using Singh’s *History of Ancient and Early Medieval India* as one of our foundations, alongside Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Yet we also devote significant time to reading literary, philosophical, and religious texts that open up the dynamics of these lost worlds for us. On the Indian side: the *R̥g Veda*, *Upaniṣads*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata*, poems by Hāla, Aśvaghoṣa, Kālidāsa, as well as works of political theory such as the *Arthaśāstra* and *Nītisāra* etc. On the Greek and Roman side, we look at the Pre-Socratic philosophers and Plato’s dialogues, Homer, Vergil, accounts of the life of Alexander the Great (e.g. Plutarch,) etc., etc.

The inscriptions in various languages issued by kings, queens, and their subordinates are especially illuminating of political history, and such official documents present an especially close formal bond across the entire geographical sphere under consideration: the Old Persian Inscriptions of the Achaemenid Empire, the emperor Augustus's *Res Gestae*, and countless coins and inscriptions in Prakrit, Sanskrit, Bactrian, etc. All these primary sources are made available in English translation. As we explore the interrelationship of representation and reality—culture, society, and political-economy—we attempt as far as possible to reconstruct the standpoint of the premodern South Asian past from its own artifacts.

Writing Intensively: This exciting journey into the ancient world is also a journey in writing. History is traditionally identified with writing, and indeed we learn most of what we know about ancient India through ancient words that have somehow come down to us from across vast stretches of time and space. Language is the primary means for formulating our own experience and understanding of this past, and writing objectifies this language so that we and our readers can examine and reexamine it for as long as we want. The richness and complexity of the premodern world—its own obsession with perfected language—can inspire us to refine our writing and knowledge simultaneously. Writing is a chance to maximize: the transparency of our analysis and interpretation; the precision of the questions we pose; the vividness of our descriptions and stories; not to mention the force of our argumentation. Writing and thinking are not separate: the two interact so intimately that in some ways we may only learn what we really think when we materialize our thoughts in writing.

PLACE-BASED LEARNING. Our inquiry this semester will profit IMMEASURABLY from our location in a heartland of the ancient world and living monument of western civilization. We will undertake weekly visits to museums, monuments, and archaeological artefacts; exploring these local cultures' richness with our own senses. Interactions at the level of art and material culture are sometimes impossible to ignore as in the case of the famous Pompei Lakshmi statue, evidence of long-distance trade in the first century. The incomparable collections of ancient art at the National Archeological Museum Florence will become familiar friends. The National Roman Museum, and the newly-opened Museum of Rescued Art are among the panoply of resources provided by the eternal city, Rome being just a 95 minutes train ride from Florence, and a certain destination for group daytrips this Spring. Frequent guest lectures by local scholars and archaeologists will add yet another beautiful color to this mosaic.

HAWAIIAN PLACE OF LEARNING.

Although this course is conducted abroad, we bring our Hawaiian place of learning with us wherever we go. The Kānaka Maoli consciousness is posited first and foremost through *aloha ʻāina* (love of the land/country). I understand this partly in terms of a concern for land and natural resources, woven into the poetry and traditional Kānaka ceremonies. These ceremonies are fundamentally about rules of “sacred conduct,” indigenous normative practices appropriate to

time, place and cultural context. These traditional prayers, chants, dances, and speeches—performed in ritual ceremonies—closely parallel those of Vedic chants and rituals with their similar concern for the entwined nature of the sacred and earthly spheres. This course invites one to be attentive to the presence of land and the cosmic world in people’s practical and everyday lives, and comparison with ōiwi culture, in which the question of right conduct takes on so much and so many kinds of significance. This kind of comparative learning with an attention to Kānaka Maoli consciousness will be our guide throughout the semester.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLO)

--Demonstrate understanding in writing of debates in the history of ancient India, Greece, Persia, and Rome in historical perspective

--Formulate comparisons in writing of ancient cultural artifacts from across the Mediterranean and South Asian worlds.

--Demonstrate understanding of debates in historiography and the practice of comparison.

--Formulate in clear writing reflections upon ancient literatures in the global perspective of the ancient world

--Demonstrate in writing an understanding of various approaches to and methodologies for studying history, and debates about how to define and categorize what we even mean by the term “history,” which of course has its own history.

Mode of Evaluation:

Students will be required to do two shorter written assignments 3-5 pages each (20% each=40% total), as take-home midterm and final exam assignments respectively, as well as one 8–10-page research paper which is due the last week of class (40%). Class attendance and participation in class will count for (20%) of the final grade.

Some writing feedback exercises will be especially critical for your attendance and participation grade. The week after the midterm is submitted, you will exchange papers and tell the class what your classmate's paper is about and what you thought about it. It is ok to be critical, but we should also be kind and try not to hurt anyone's feelings. Likewise, the week before you submit your final 8-10-pager paper, you will share an abstract (see below "what is a paper abstract?") of your paper with both the instructor and one of your fellow students. Again, everyone will briefly present another student's concept for their paper based on the abstract, offering thoughts and suggestions.

About the Written Assignments:

The two, short written assignments—which make up the midterm and final exam—are meant to be response papers, where you discuss your reactions to, experience and understandings of, at least two primary texts. They do not need to be as organized and methodical as your final paper, but should be clear, persuasive, and polished, as well as free of grammatical, spelling, and other mistakes.

The final research paper (8-10 pages) is a chance to think in depth about a topic and discuss at least 3 of the readings we have studied thus far. Apart from this minimal constraint, you are free to choose the specific topic, and encouraged to consult with me about it. You are being asked to think critically about the categories we use to understand premodern India and its textual and traditions. How, for example, do ancient Indian poets and modern scholars each make use of these narrative poems in distinctive ways? How do ancient Indian authors think about tradition, historical time, and change versus how a modern scholar might approach these topics? How do modern categories like "India," "Hindu," "religion," "mythology," etc. both help and hinder our understanding? **The most important part of the paper is your own interpretation/argument, which should be indicated at the outset and then supported with examples from our readings.**

DUE DATES=The first response paper will be due WEEK 6. The Second response paper is due ON THE SCHEDULED DATE OF THE FINAL EXAM, BY THE END OF THE SCHEDULED TIME FOR THE FINAL EXAM. THE FINAL RESEARCH PAPER IS DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE LAST WEEK OF CLASS.

None of the immediate sources of your paper should be websites (e.g. Wikipedia, Yahoo Answers, etc.).

What is a paper abstract? This consists of 150-300 words outlining your paper's basic concept, what you intend to argue or prove, and which materials you will use to support your case. It is essentially like an outline of your paper written as a paragraph. Expressing the fundamental concept of an essay in an abstract is a challenging task, but it is such a useful skill to develop. If you apply for a grant, you will have to provide a good abstract. Everyone struggles to condense and synthesize their ideas in an abstract, but it provides the additional reward of helping you to clarify and boil down your most essential ideas. Writing the abstract before you have written—or while you are writing—the paper is challenging and it can only be provisional, i.e. you might transform your argument as you write the actual paper, but the exercise of writing an abstract will help you organize your thoughts and then give you more of a flow as you write your paper.

PLEASE NOTE: THIS SYLLABUS WILL BE UPDATED THROUGHOUT THE SEMESTER SO IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT YOU CHECK IT FOR UPDATES AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK

WEEK 1) The Premodern and the Modern, the West and the East. Introducing Ancient India, Greece, Persia, and Rome.

WEEK 2-5 India and Greece.

WEEK 5-8 India and Persia.

WEEK 9-12 India and Rome.

MIDTERM AND FINAL PAPER INSTRUCTIONS =

1) THE PRIOR WEEK, POST YOUR PAPER ABSTRACT TO LAULIMA AND COMMENT ON ONE CLASSMATE'S PAPER ABSTRACT. REVIEW.

2) SUBMIT YOUR ASSIGNMENT ON THE DUE DATE TO "CLASS DISCUSSIONS" =

General prompt for midterm and final: Choosing your topic is part of this assignment, and it is intended as an exercise in creative freedom. That said, there is one rule=please write comparatively about at least 2-3 sources we have studied thus far.

You are encouraged to think critically about how what counts as a source of history or work of history writing differs radically in different times and places (e.g. ancient India vs. ancient or modern Oahu). Reviewing materials from week 1 and 2 could be helpful. Creative analysis and comparison is especially welcome.