



THIS IS Central and Southwest Asia

The Newsletter of the Central and Southwest Asia Program at
The University of Montana

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Central and Southwest Asia Program Honors Three Distinguished UM Faculty Members

By Otto Koester



From Left to right: Professors Frank Bessac, Darshan Kang, and Dennis O'Donnell were honored at the opening reception for the Central and Southwest Asia Program's new location in the Old Journalism Building.

On November 19, 2007, the Central and Southwest Asian Studies Program celebrated the opening of its new facilities in the Old Journalism Building on the UM campus. Faculty, students, staff and members of the community joined President George Dennison and Provost Royce Engstrom, to honor the contributions of several distinguished UM faculty who, on this special occasion, were recognized as some of the Program's real "founding fathers" long before its formal creation.

In his words of welcome to the audience, Dr. Kia first thanked President George Dennison and Provost Royce Engstrom for their encouragement and support in helping the Program to grow, find its new quarters, and become a national leader in the field of Central and Southwest Asian Studies. He then proceeded to pay tribute to three distinguished former UM professors

without whose early leadership, commitment and vision the creation of the Central and Southwest Asian Studies Program would not have been possible.

Honored for their early contributions were three Professors Emeriti: Dr. Frank Bessac, Department of Anthropology, 1965 to 1989; Dr. Darshan Kang, Department of Geography, 1972 to 2004; and Dr. Dennis O'Donnell, Department of Economics, 1974 to 2007. In his tribute to the honorees, Dr. Kia praised their pioneering teaching and research as well as their dedication and commitment to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the region.

The new space in the Old Journalism Building will allow the Central and Southwest Asian Studies Program to expand its activities in the areas of academics, research, training, and outreach.

Spring Semester 2008 Central & Southwest Asia Program Courses



HIST/ANTH/A.S. 106 Silk Road
Instructor: Ardi Kia

HIST/ANTH/A.S. 284 Islamic Civilization: The
Modern Era
Instructor: Mehrdad Kia

HIST/ANTH/A.S. 402 Cities and Landscapes
of Central Asia
Instructor: Ardi Kia

HIST/ANTH/GEOG/PSC 495 02: Turkey and
Her Neighbors: Exploring a Regional Power-
house
Instructor: Thomas Goltz

HIST/ANTH/GEOG/PSC 495 03: Azerbaijan:
In Search of Identity
Instructor: Thomas Goltz

GEOG 496-29 International Crisis Reporting
Instructor: Thomas Goltz

ARAB 102 Elementary Modern
Standard Arabic II
Instructors: Samir Bitar & Khaled Huthaily

ARAB 295 Intermediate Modern
Standard Arabic II
Instructor: Samir Bitar

ARAB 395 Advanced Modern Arabic
Instructor: Khaled Huthaily

MCLG 195 Elementary Turkish II
Instructor: Tamila Meladze

In Search of Zoroaster (Zarathustra) and Brahma: A Journey into Indo-Iranian Cultures

By Bharath Sriraman

In Fall 2008, Central and Southwest Asian Studies will offer a course entitled "In search of Zoroaster and Brahma" which will serve as an introduction to Indo-Iranian civilizations and cultures. Unlike modern maps which show (a) artificially drawn boundaries by the colonizers of Southwest/Central Asia and the Indian sub-continent, and (b) boundaries arising from the spread of Buddhism and later Islam, the peoples of these regions share a common proto Indo-Iranian pagan religion, an intricate intertwined past with common beliefs, mythologies and cosmology. In particular the religion of the ancient Persians (Zoroastrianism or Mazdaism) and the ancient Indians (Vedic or old Brahmanism) reveal this common linguistic and liturgical past, in the names and concepts used.

For instance Boyce (1992) writes in "remoter times the ancestors of both the Iranians and the Indians had formed one people, identified as the proto-Indo-Iranians" (p.2). The two central objects of worship of these Proto-Indo-Iranians were fire and water, which were considered sacred and offered as libations as a form of sacrifice. These sacrificial rituals were called Yasna (in Avestan) by the Zoroastrians and Yajna (in Sanskrit) in the Vedic tradition. Ritual offerings made in the fire altars were prepared from milk and the leaves of one plant. In Sanskrit the pounded plant is called Soma while in Avestan it is called Hoama, meaning 'that which is pressed'. There are various speculative theories on the identity of the specific ingredients used in these rituals, particularly, that of the Soma drink which had super-natural powers. Hoama/Soma is still used ritually within Zoroastrian and Vedic rituals today. Over the course of time the pastoral peoples that once settled Iran and the plains of India evolved into their modern identity. However conquests (including more modern colonialism) and the spread of various religions continued to cross fertilize and influence language, customs and traditions. The purpose of this course is to unravel these intricate connections between Indo-Iranian civilizations from ancient to contemporary times. The course begins with the Gathas of Zoroaster and the Rig veda of the vedic Indians and culminate in an examination of the conflicted modern identity of Iranians and Indians. Along this 3000 year journey, the major themes that will arise and be explored in this course are:

- (1) Zoroastrianism and Vedic Hinduism
- (2) Shamanistic and animistic elements in Zoroastrianism and Vedic Hinduism and its transformation into monotheism
- (3) Similarities in languages in the Indo-Iranian group [Sanskrit and Old Persian].
- (4) The structure of ancient Indo-Iranian societies
- (5) The mathematical elements of this time period, particularly the intricate ritual geometry involved in the construction of fire altars in Bactria.
- (6) The influence of Buddhism
- (7) Buddhist logic as an example of a Non-Aristotleian Logic
- (8) The dawn of Islam
- (9) The Mughal empire and a renewed fusion of art, religion, culture and languages
- (10) Sufism- the web that connects India and Iran
- (11) The dawn of artificial boundaries as a result of colonialism
- (12) The intact common past in Central Asia
- (13) Modern "national" identities of citizens of India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran
- (14) Commonalities in arts, poetry and modern languages
- (15) Urdu and Farsi lyrics in classical Hindi films that preserve cultural bonds.
- (16) The identity crisis in denial of shared histories/past and culture

References

Boyce, M (1992). Zoroastrianism: It's Antiquity and Constant Vigor. Mazda Publishers, Costa Mesa, California.

Chattopadhyaya, K. C (1978). Vedic Studies: New Directions in Light of Indo-Iranian Material. Studies in Vedic and Indo-Iranian Religion and Literature. Vol 2. (edited by Vidya Niwas Misra) Amar Printing Press.

Academic Minor in Central and Southwest Asian Studies

Central and Southwest Asia is a vast region rich in history, culture, natural resources, and geopolitical importance. The birthplace of many of the ancient world's religions and empires, it is the home to remarkable centers of learning, and the arena of devastating conflict.

Despite its fascinating past and strategic importance, the region is one of the most neglected in the curricula of American colleges and universities. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and increasing American military involvement in the area, the strategic importance of the region has reemerged.

The University of Montana is a national leader in recognizing the significance of Central and Southwest Asia, and is translating this awareness into a major academic program. The program builds upon considerable faculty experience and expertise in the region, and includes scholars from various UM departments.

The University of Montana offers an academic Minor in Central and Southwest Asian Studies with a variety of new courses. Persian, Arabic, Turkish and Russian language instruction are also offered. Faculty exchanges have been organized with universities in Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Morocco, Egypt, China and Russia.

The Central and Southwest Asian Studies Minor is available to all students. It consists of eighteen credits. Students selecting the Minor are required to successfully complete HIST/ANTH/A.S. 106 and six credits in foundational Central and Southwest Asian Studies courses (200-level courses). Students must then complete nine credits of additional coursework at the 300- or 400-level. No language courses are required; however, students pursuing the Minor are strongly encouraged to meet the university-wide general education foreign language competency requirement by completing at least the second semester of one of the following languages (100 level or higher): Arabic, Chinese, Persian, Turkish, Russian. Participation in a study-abroad program is strongly recommended.

Introductory Course (3 credits)

HIST/ANTH/A.S. 106H Silk Road, 3 cr., offered every semester

Select Two of the Following Foundational Courses (6 credits):

HIST/ANTH/A.S. 214S Central Asia: Peoples and Environments, 3 cr., autumn semester

HIST/ANTH/A.S. 283H Islamic Civilization: The Classical Age, 3 cr., autumn semester

HIST/ANTH/A.S. 284H Islamic Civilization: The Modern Era, 3 cr., spring semester

Select Three of the Following 300- and 400-Level Courses (9 credits):

HIST/ANTH/A.S. 346H (was 345S) Central Asia and Its Neighbors, 3 cr., spring semester

HIST/ANTH/A.S. 386H Nationalism in the Modern Middle East, 3 cr., autumn semester

HIST/ANTH/A.S. 387H Iran between Two Revolutions, 3 cr., spring semester

HIST/ANTH/A.S. 462H (was 402) Cities and Landscapes of Central and Southwest Asia, 3 cr., autumn semester

HIST/ANTH/A.S. 461H (was 457) Artistic Traditions of Central Asia, 3 cr., autumn semester

HIST/ANTH/A.S. 460H Central Asia Seminar, 3 cr., spring semester

HIST/ANTH/A.S. 496 Independent Study: The Middle East, 1-9 cr., every semester

HIST/ANTH/A.S. 496 Independent Study: Central Asia, 1-9 cr., every semester

Arabic Language and Culture Program Grant Awarded

By Samir I. Bitar

The University of Montana (UM) has been awarded a \$45,270.00 grant from the National Foreign Language Center at the University of Maryland to support an Arabic Language summer Institute for High School students as part of a national STARTALK initiative.

The University of Montana proposed to organize a Montana Arabic Summer Institute (MASI) for high school students to develop their language skills and cultural knowledge of Arabic. The program will build on the existing UM Arabic teaching resources and experience to initiate a carefully designed five-week summer institute that targets 11th and 12th grade high school students. The objective will be for 24 students to develop the communication skills of a novice-mid speaker or better based on the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). The program will also familiarize students with Arabic cuisine, music, poetry, dress, customs, traditions, and body language to develop cultural knowledge.

The key persons who will be responsible for this project comprise a seasoned team. They are:

a) Professor Mehrdad Kia, Principal Investigator and Associate Provost for International Programs, Director of the Central and Southwest Asia Program, and Professor of Islamic Civilization. He has directed many projects and grants and will be responsible for overseeing all aspects of the implementation, including the instructional and administrative personnel, financial management, evaluation, and reporting requirements.

b) Professor Samir I. Bitar, MASI Program Director and lecturer in Arabic Language & Culture at The University of Montana since 1999. He is a native speaker and will be one of two leading instructors for both the summer institute and on-line distance components. He previously taught Math and lectured on Arabic language and culture in a local middle school, is a frequent speaker in local middle and high school classrooms, and teaches Beginning and Intermediate Arabic.

Central Asian Expert to Visit UM

From March 4-9, The Central and Southwest Asia Program will host the distinguished scholar Dr. Valery P. Nikonorov. Dr. Nikonorov is a Visiting Fulbright Scholar at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. While at Rutgers, he is conducting research at the Center for European Studies. He is an expert on the art of warfare within the Central Asian section of the Great Silk Routes. During his visit, Dr. Nikonorov will visit classrooms and present in the Central and Southwest Brown Bag Lecture Series. In addition, he will provide an evening lecture on March 5 at 7:00 PM on the Dell Brown Room. For questions about his visit please email Brian Lofink at brian.lofink@mso.umt.edu.

Resident Scholar to Give Lectures

Resident Scholar Thomas Goltz will be traveling to London, Washington D.C. and San Francisco in late February to deliver three key note addresses at the War College Museum (London), George Washington University (Washington D.C.) and UCLA/Berkeley on the subject of the Khodjali Massacre in Azerbaijan at the hands of Armenian irregulars on February 25/26, 1992.



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Central & Southwest Asia Brown Bag

All presentations are held from noon to 1 PM in the Central and Southwest Asia Program seminar room (Old Journalism 303) and are free and open to the public.

Tuesday, February 12: **Talking Turkey: The Headscarf Scandal: A Long Overdue Change Toward Freedom of Expression, or An Unlikely Assault On Ataturk's Secular Establishment?**

Presenter: Thomas Goltz

Wednesday, February 20: **A Legislator's Journey to Kyrgyzstan**

Presenter: Honorable Carol Williams, Montana State Senator

Thursday, February 28: **Georgian Political Cycle: The Results and New Beginning**

Presenter: Ia Iashvili, Visiting Scholar from Kutaisi State University

Thursday, March 6: **Art of Warfare in Central Asia**

Presenter: Valery P. Nikonorov, Visiting Fullbright Scholar at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

Tuesday, March 18th: **Emergence and Development of Civil Society in Central Asia: A 10 Year Retrospective**

Presenter: Garth Willis, Founder and Director, Alpine Fund, Bishkek and Minneapolis

Thursday, April 10: **Indo-Iranian Civilizations: The Rise and Fall of the Mughal Empire**

Presenter: Bharath Sriraman, Associate Professor, Department of Mathematical Sciences

Date Tuesday, April 22: **Law and Policy of Land Protection in the Kyrgyz Republic**

Presenter: Elizabeth W. Erickson, Law Student, The University of Montana

Date Tuesday, April 29: **NGOs in Kyrgyzstan**

Presenter: Aimona Tashieva, UM Graduate Student from Kyrgyzstan

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