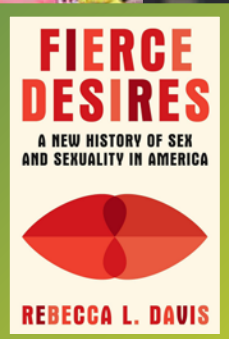
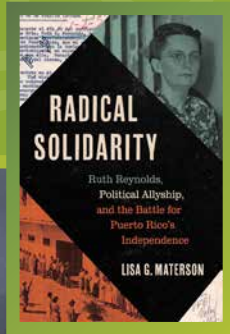




Annual Report
2023-2024
Princeton University
Center for Culture,
Society and Religion



Our Mission

Founded in 1999 as the Center for the Study of Religion, we expanded our mission in 2021 to become the Center for Culture, Society, and Religion at Princeton University. We remain committed to encouraging greater intellectual exchange and interdisciplinary scholarly studies about religion among faculty and students in the humanities and social sciences, while developing a new emphasis on raising the level of the public conversation on religion. The Center promotes scholarly research and teaching that examine religion comparatively and empirically in its diverse historical and contemporary manifestations. It aims to facilitate understanding of religion through a program of support for Princeton faculty to pursue teaching, research, and public event planning; awards for Princeton graduate students to complete dissertation research and learn to communicate their research through new media; funding for undergraduate students to write senior theses and junior papers; weekly interdisciplinary seminars; undergraduate courses; public lectures and conferences; and opportunities for visiting scholars to affiliate with the Center.

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Academic Initiatives

The Center offers weekly interdisciplinary seminars that bring together faculty, visiting scholars, and graduate student fellows to present and discuss research in progress. CCSR also offers funding for Princeton faculty to develop and teach new Freshman Seminars and undergraduate courses. The sponsorship of new courses across the university curriculum is part of our commitment to scholarly research and teaching that examines religion theoretically, comparatively, and empirically in its diverse historical and contemporary manifestations.

Culture, Society and Religion Workshops

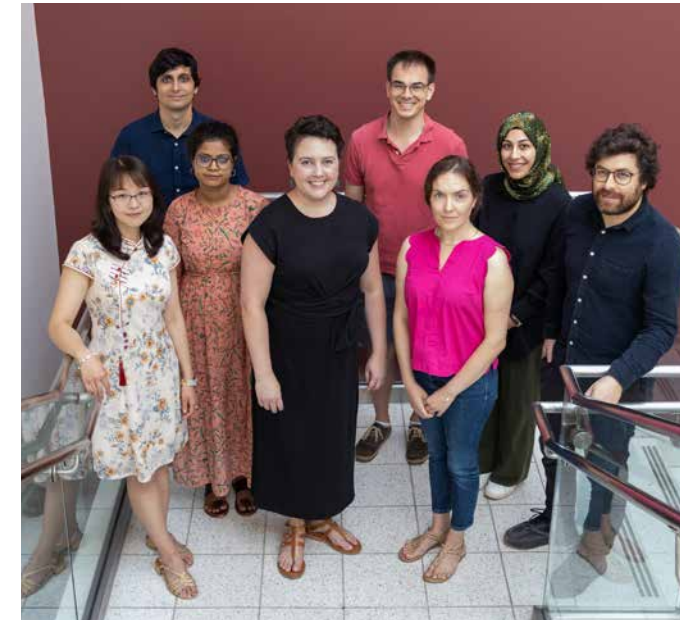
The Culture, Society and Religion Workshops are weekly interdisciplinary seminars exploring religion in its diverse historical, contemporary, philosophical, and literary manifestations. CCSR graduate student fellows, postdoctoral fellows, and affiliated scholars present work-in-progress (usually related to a chapter of their dissertation or book project) and receive constructive criticism. Papers are prepared and distributed in advance

of each week's meeting. Participants in these seminars develop a level of trust that allows them to share the challenges of writing and offer each other supportive yet critical feedback. We also aim to encourage intellectual interchange with specialists outside one's normal discipline or subfield.

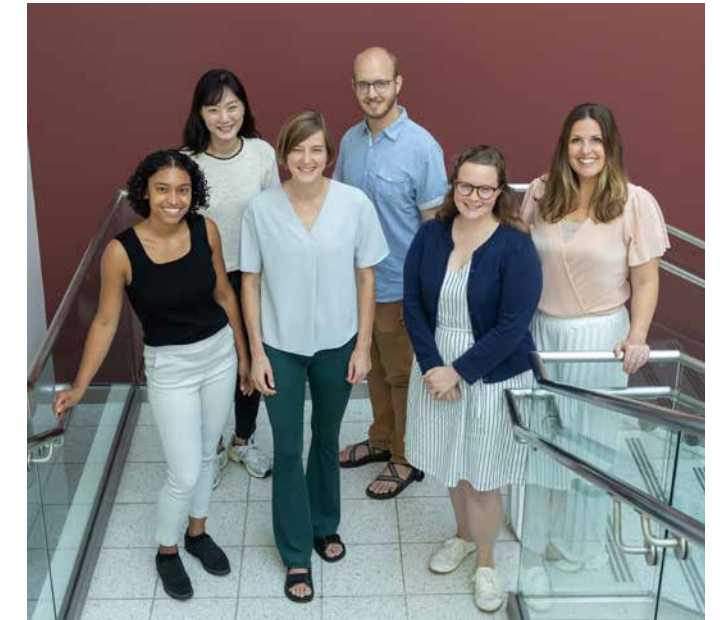
This year the three sections of the workshop were led by CCSR Associate Director Jenny Wiley Legath (Monday), former Visiting Fellow Lauren Kerby Langlois (Tuesday), and Visiting Fellow Suzanne van Geuns (Wednesday).



Left to right, back row: Aleksander Musial, Matthew Dowd, Akrish Adhikari, Jeremy Stitts; **Left to right, front row:** Kim Akano, Jenny Wiley Legath, Rachel Brown-Weinstock, Jae Pi, Kelly Carton, Ipsita Dey



Left to right: Liya Xie, Constantine Theodoridis, Navjit Kaur, Lauren Kerby Langlois, Simon Conrad, Nura Liepsner, Aysenur Cam, Omri Matarasso



Left to right: Mélena Laudig, Sinae Kim, Suzanne van Geuns, Albert Kohn, Sarah Norvell, Lauren K. McCormick

Sponsored Undergraduate Course

Flora Champy, French and Italian FRS 190 "Reasons to Believe: Religions of Enlightenment" Spring 2024

Is social life even possible without some form of religion? But which form should that be? What is the purpose of a profession of faith? To understand why these questions still matter today, we need to go back to the source of the process called "secularization." In eighteenth-century Europe, Enlightenment philosophers relentlessly questioned the moral, social and historical aspects of one of the most common human phenomena. This course explored the multiple notions they devised to apprehend it--faith, ritual, deism, atheism, fanaticism, superstition, and how these concepts may inform today's public debate. For the April 11-12 public event, "Reasons to Believe: Enlightenment and the Sacred," held in conjunction with this course, see page 31.

religion in public discourse, bringing value to the scholarly community both here at Princeton and at large, and also the greater public. This mission is accomplished through a Media Team (see below) and an annual series of events (see page 23). The Center employs a team of Princeton graduate students, who receive professional training in communications and the more technical aspects of audio and visual media production. Then they use this training to conduct interviews with established scholars in the relevant fields. Some of these interviews are held as public events, while others are less formal conversations. These exchanges are then edited into accessible audio and video media and posted for public and educational use on our website. The production of these materials benefits the graduate students pedagogically and professionally and benefits the public by providing accurate, current, and relevant content for discussions around religion today. The 2023-2024 theme for this series was "Bodies and Embodiment."

Media Team

The Media Team was created as a means of training graduate students to share their academic research on religion with a broad audience through the use

Religion and the Public Conversation

The Religion and the Public Conversation initiative aims to raise the level of the conversation around issues of

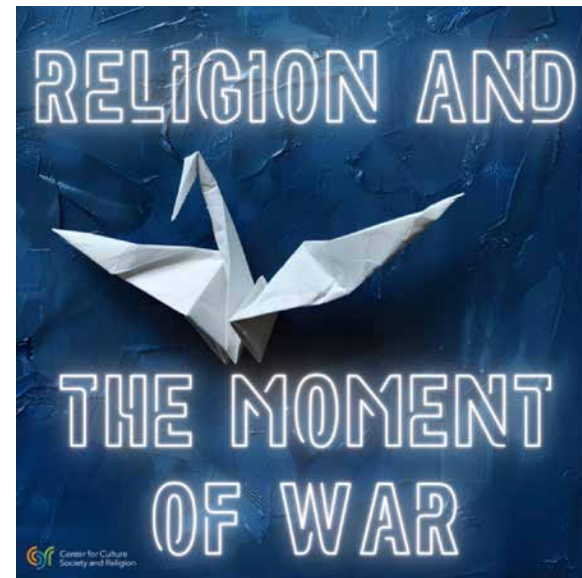
of new digital media. Led by Religion and the Public Conversation Fellows Suzanne van Geuns and Lauren

McCormick, in conjunction with Center Director Jonathan Gold, the media team worked on two projects this year.

In the fall term, the pedagogical aim was for students to learn how they might translate their academic insights into a register that people outside the academy can not only understand but also come to find important. Team members pursued this translational goal through workshop-based events, such as the Distilling Your Message workshop with Carolyn Hall, and by doing different exercises focused on remediation, such as asking, what happens when we tell the same story by different means? Students also trained in technical skills such as video editing. The team applied the insights from this training to create videos answering the prompt “what kind of person does religion make?” Each member answered that question from the perspective of their research, and the videos were wildly different. Taken together, the videos highlight how vast religious studies is, both in content and methodology. The video project also made clear that team members are creative people who usually channel their energy into academic writings. By the end of the term, each student produced a one-minute video that presented one of their research insights and translated it to the concerns of a wider public; they became little pieces of art, purposely open-ended and thought-provoking.

War dominated the news this year, and in the spring term, the team created the podcast “Religion and the Moment of War,” a series that asks what scholars of religion can contribute to public audiences. As opposed to offering insights on one particular conflict, the team sought to elucidate phenomena that recur at

the intersection of religion and war over time. Through “Religion and the Moment of War,” team members



practiced becoming public scholars and invited others to take that leap as well. Each student interviewed a senior academic and then built a 15-minute podcast episode around that interview. Again, the aim was to connect and be useful: how can academic knowledge about religion be helpful and insightful for a public that is facing the deeper questions that war brings up? Students practiced podcast recording and editing, with the assistance of the Digital Learning Lab, but they also gained experience giving each other feedback on the more conceptual parts of media production: framing, pacing, and scaffolding (through the insertion of a narrative voice) the denser parts of the conversation. Students found that their greatest resource was each other. Since the exercise was to edit another academic’s speech, the finished podcast series clearly showcases students’ impressive skills in doing the translation work that public relevance requires, closing the gap between the ivory tower and the wider world.

2023-2024 Media Team productions:

“Religion in Two Minutes or Less” YouTube playlist of seven videos

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLGGaPnAQJmvs9X-HQrs_gccm4TBWyzAx

“Religion and the Moment of War” Spotify podcast series

<https://open.spotify.com/show/7cWLn7ombcA0qakcHklwzU>

“It felt invigorating to think in a different register and to create a different kind of product. I gained more fluency in my ideas by presenting them as a video, as art.”

—**Lauren McCormick**,
Visiting Fellow

The students reported that the media team not only convinced them that their academic work is relevant but also gave them confidence to articulate how it meaningfully speaks to issues of public concern, both within and beyond the academy. That feeling of empowerment is what I am hoping they will take with them in their careers, and to see it reflected in their episodes and in their reflections on their experience has been a real joy.

—**Suzanne van Geuns**,
Visiting Fellow

People

Visiting Fellows



Tenzin Bhuchung

My year as a postdoctoral fellow in Buddhist Philosophy at the Center for Culture, Society, and Religion has been immensely enriching for my academic growth. The weekly seminars provided me with exposure to a diverse array of topics spanning disciplines within the Social Sciences and Humanities, including history, religion, anthropology, sociology, and literature. In preparing for these sessions, I delved into the research methods utilized in each paper, which in turn granted me a comprehensive understanding of the underlying epistemological and ontological foundations of various disciplines. Through this process, I gained insight into the interdisciplinary nature of many fields of knowledge and how each contributes to a deeper comprehension of the others. Throughout the year, Professor Jonathan Gold and I co-facilitated an advanced reading group in Tibetan and Sanskrit tailored for graduate

students in Buddhist Studies. I am confident that this initiative has proven to be profoundly enriching and advantageous for all participants involved. Additionally, I conducted research on topics within Buddhist philosophy, exploring key doctrines of the Yogacara School and general Buddhist epistemology within Tibetan Buddhism. I plan to integrate this research into my book manuscript. My project, entitled “Gampopa’s Mahāmudrā: View, Meditation, Conduct,” is the first book-length work on Gampopa’s Mahāmudrā, elucidating it through the traditional rubric of the view (*Ita ba*), the meditation (*sgom pa*) and the conduct (*spyod pa*), exploring respectively the philosophical view, the meditational practices (including exploring the epistemological question of how reality can be understood) and the ethical foundations of the Mahāmudrā tradition. While pursuing my research at Princeton, a primary objective is to critically assess the reception of Gampopa’s Mahāmudrā teachings in Tibet. This endeavor will culminate in an additional chapter, enriching the dissertation’s scope before its eventual publication as a book.

Lauren K. McCormick

As I began my time at CCSR, I took up two personal dream projects: a web exhibit and video podcast. My base research is on feminized clay figurines from the biblical world, called Judean Pillar Figurines. I use imaging technology to study these



Lauren K. McCormick

figurines, revealing fine surface details. The best way to view this data is on a screen, as opposed to traditional print media. Because one imaging technology I use (“RTI”) and its embeddable software (“Relight”) are relatively new, most sites do not have the infrastructure to host them. I consulted various colleagues across Princeton—Leigh Lieberman, Bryan Winston, Jen Grayburn, Jeri Wieringa—and teamed with CollectionBuilder to create a static site able to host my data. The resulting web exhibit allows viewers to manipulate light on a figurine fragment for themselves, which works to democratize notoriously restrictive museum access, aids in object documentation, and helps build a community of scholars accustomed to scrutinizing digital images. My video podcast is called “Getting Past Religion.” It is a quintessentially “CCSR” project in that I use my own area of expertise to connect to today’s issues while also reflecting on the field of religious studies. I use Judean Pillar Figurines as a proxy to discuss contemporary social issues and/or

cutting-edge trends in the humanities. The podcast seeks to elucidate the biblical past at the same time that it acknowledges the deleterious effects biblical texts have had in the modern world. Judean Pillar Figurines open worlds of conversation that I am excited to share! The podcast will launch in Fall 2024. Outside the web exhibit and podcast, I had a few other projects in the works. A volume I am co-editing entitled *Ambiguity in the Ancient Near East: Material Records, Mental Constructs, and their Interpretations* (Brepols) went to peer review. I submitted my own article for that volume to CCSR's writing workshop and benefitted deeply from the feedback. An entry I wrote on Judean Pillar Figurines was accepted at Bible Odyssey, a site geared at nonspecialists and run by



the Society of Biblical Literature. I was thrilled to travel to Norway with my former advisor James W. Watts for a seminar called "Authoritative Texts and Their Receptions." I also presented papers at annual conferences that are more usual for me, run by the American Society of Overseas Research and the Society of Biblical Literature. I joined my first steering committee, which is for SBL's "Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Bible" section. I continue in my involvement with Digging Up Data, a mentorship program aimed at data literacy. In summer, I had additional artifacts imaged, including via photogrammetry (3D modeling), which is new for me! I met many new colleagues, who added so much to my experience of the year.

Suzanne C. van Geuns

This year, I completed an article to submit to the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* this summer. My book manuscript, *Seductive Methods: Sexual Success in the Computational Imagination*, is a genealogy of misogynist frustration and an inquiry into our shared computational condition. It is also a history of seduction forums, which are online domains that begin from the assumption that sex with

women, or indeed success more broadly, is an achievement born of men's methodological expertise. Across the forty-year archive this book assembles, from scattered bulletin board systems in the 1980s to consolidated social media platforms in the 2010s, seduction forums envisioned a path toward success that is distinctly computational: systems, loops, and algorithms are integral to the methods they espouse. When users imagine themselves improving their social intelligence, they reach for the language and logics of artificial intelligence. *Seductive Methods* follows this computational imagination as it structures increasingly violent misogyny on computer networks, from the successes envisioned by methodical virtuosos who call themselves "seduction gurus" to the growing number of mass shootings perpetrated by "involuntary celibates" certain that no method will work for them. Drawing the study of religion, gender studies, and the history of computing together in a new analytic of methodological form, *Seductive Methods* presents ways to think about the intimate power that the computational imagination now exerts over hope, desire, and its frustration. My book is under contract with the University of Chicago Press and will appear in its Class 200 series. For my own public-facing work, I presented the Does Not Compute toolkit I made last year in a workshop organized by the Center for Information, Technology, and Public life at UNC. I also joined the editorial team at The Immanent Frame, where I am currently co-curating an upcoming forum on religion and violence.



PEOPLE

Crossroads Fellow



Alphonso Saville, IV

In the 2023-34 academic year, I completed my book, *The Gospel of John Marrant: Conjuring Christianity in the Black Atlantic*. I am delighted to announce that the book is currently in production for publication and will be released on August 30, 2024, by Duke University Press in the Religious Cultures of African and African Diaspora People series. I have been appointed as Assistant Professor of Church History and Mission at Union Presbyterian Seminary. The position will commence on July 1, 2024. Over the past year, I had several opportunities to present my work to both academic communities and the public. As the devotional speaker at the Memphis Teacher Residency's "Honoring the Memphis 13" Symposium, I contributed to the symposium which explored the history of school desegregation in Memphis, TN, honoring the original 13 students who desegregated the school system in the early 1960s. At the Universities Studying Slavery Symposium at Dalhousie University, I presented research related to my forthcoming book.

This symposium in Halifax, NS, was a significant networking opportunity where I connected with scholars and public historians interested in my work on John Marrant. At the "Ways of Being: Evolving Religion in America" Symposium at the Jamestown Settlement Museum, hosted by the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, my presentation titled "Conjuring Christianity: Ritual, Myth, and Meaning in Early Black Religion" was well received, leading to an invitation to return once my book is published. I made significant progress on the draft of my next book, *The Problem of God and Slavery: A History of Religion and Slave Owning in Maryland*. This project will continue to develop in the upcoming academic year. I look forward to continuing my work and contributing to the vibrant scholarly community at Union Presbyterian Seminary and beyond.

Affiliate Visiting Fellow



Nareman Amin

My book manuscript "Is God for Revolution" is about social change in a time of political upheaval and uncertainty. My research is based on an in-depth analysis of 60 interviews with Muslim Egyptians

in 2018 and 2019 and ethnographic fieldwork from 2015 to 2019. I explore the ways in which political participation in a revolution and the emotions that the unprecedented democratic moment in Egypt evoked changed the landscape of religious discourse and practice. Before the revolution, for much of their early lives, my interlocutors found themselves in structures of culturally agreed-upon forms of religiosity. They were raised during what scholars call the "Islamic Awakening" of the late twentieth century and heeded the advice of religious figures that circulated freely in mass media. Visible markers of piety, such as the veil for women and beards for men, became commonplace. Anthropologists of Islam have emphasized the importance of embodiment as explicated by the rich Islamic tradition to the formation of a pious, ethical Muslim self. In the wake of the 2011 uprising and its perceived political defeat, my interlocutors broke free of many of these structural conceptions of Islam. My book shows how, for many youth, revolutionary emotions, notably hope, disillusionment, shock and anger, transformed their understandings of what it means to identify as a pious Muslim resulting in a fluidity with regards to how one reaches moral and religious perfection.

Graduate Student Fellows

Akrish Adhikari, "Teledrumming (1922-1971)"

Kimberly Akano, "Welcome Intruders: Religion, Empire, and West African Student Migration"



Kimberly Akano

My dissertation examines the largely neglected religious history of West African student migration to the United States from 1895-1965. I examine how religious actors, institutions, and discourse were central in mediating West African student migration during the twentieth century. I also consider how West African students selectively and ambivalently engaged with U.S. religio-political ideas and practices, often upsetting their U.S. benefactors' aspirations and expectations. Through case studies focused on how U.S. actors recruited West African students, and by attending to the lived experiences of students' encounters in the U.S., this dissertation hopes to contribute to ongoing scholarly discussions about the relationship between religion and migration through the lens of international education.

Michael Brill, "The Political Life and Afterlife of Michel 'Aflaq in Iraq"

This work examines the political activities of Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party founder Michel 'Aflaq in Iraq, along with official commemoration of him following his death in 1989. Born to a middle class Orthodox Christian family in Damascus in 1910, 'Aflaq died as a Muslim and was

buried in Baghdad after receiving a state funeral, his coffin draped in an Iraqi flag. Based primarily on the archives of the Iraqi Ba'ath Party, this dissertation attempts to document the final chapter of 'Aflaq's life working on behalf of the Iraqi Ba'ath Party and Saddam Hussein, a subject that has received little attention in scholarship to date. The foreword and introduction of the dissertation address the history of Iraqi archives and some of the ethical issues associated with using them as sources, along with the non-governmental organization that retrieved the records of the Ba'ath Party from underneath 'Aflaq's mausoleum in the wake of the 2003 U.S.-led invasion. The first chapter covers the feuding within the Syrian branch of the Ba'ath Party, along with the rivalry between it and the Iraqi branch, which ultimately played a decisive role in the development of 'Aflaq's close personal relationship with Saddam and his eventual move to Baghdad. The second chapter examines 'Aflaq's intellectual writings on Islam and his personal views, which evolved against the backdrop of Iraq's war with the Islamic Republic of Iran between 1980-1988. The third and final chapter follows the documentation to reconstruct the process of designing 'Aflaq's mausoleum and museum, which provides an inside look at how the Iraqi Ba'ath remembered and commemorated the party founder between 1989 and 2003. The conclusion connects these threads, pointing toward a fuller historical picture of Michel 'Aflaq and the international history of the Ba'ath Party in the Middle East.

Rachel Brown-Weinstock, "Navigating the Narrative Rupture: How a Bible Belt Community Negotiated America's 'Racial Reckoning'"



Aysenur Cam, "Reading Revelation: Rethinking a Muslim Ethics of Environment"

This dissertation examines how Qur'anic conceptions of nature can offer an ethically and epistemically innovative way of relating to the world. In this project, I construct an Islamic eco-ethic that re-situates Qur'anic terms often utilized in environmental thought within their discursive, epistemic contexts. I examine how Qur'anic descriptions of nature have been understood and employed in classical and contemporary Islamic scholarship, and how these references to nature can inform the ethical relationship between human beings and the environment. Engaging in the fields of Muslim thought, environmental ethics, and Qur'anic hermeneutics, my dissertation offers an ethics of interaction between humans and the world that is grounded in the Qur'an's characterization of the cosmos as a kind of divine speech.

PEOPLE



Kelly Carlton, "Children in Medieval Chinese Buddhism: Discourses on Ethics and Practice"

This dissertation examines portrayals of children and childhood in medieval Chinese Buddhism from the fourth to tenth centuries CE. It considers how a burgeoning Buddhist tradition in medieval China drew upon the figure of the child to understand its religious commitments and ethical ideals. The dissertation argues that children's moral status was distinct from that of adults in medieval Chinese Buddhism. This distinction arose as Chinese adherents reconciled novel concepts introduced from Indian Buddhist traditions, such as karma and rebirth, with indigenous Chinese notions of childhood and moral development. This study forges interdisciplinary connections between religious studies and histories of childhood. It introduces an "age-critical perspective," which employs age as an analytical category to reevaluate a range of Buddhist sources— anecdotal literature, hagiographies, monastic codes, liturgies, donor inscriptions and portraits—with an attention to cultural definitions of childhood.



Emily Chesley, "Women on the Edge: A Social History of Women in Late Roman Syria, 5th-8th c."

My dissertation writes the first social history of lay women in the eastern provinces of the Late Roman Empire. The fifth through eighth centuries saw numerous upheavals hit the Roman provinces of Syria I and II, Mesopotamia, Oshrohene, and Armenia I-IV: Sassanian invasions, plague outbreaks, religious controversies, and violent earthquakes. My dissertation examines the multiple social precarities women navigated during this time, drawing on church chronicles, sermons, ecclesiastical and imperial laws, hagiographies, and limited epigraphic evidence in Greek, Syriac, and Arabic. Chapters highlight the violence of war, difficulties accessing justice, infertility, widowhood, and prostitution. The project provides an important, first-time lens into these core life experiences of eastern women. It demonstrates that class and religious affiliation impacted how severely women experienced these different precarities, while at the same time showing that societal threats loomed for all.



Simon Conrad, "Reanimating Modernity: Mysticism in Modern Arabic Thought, 1919-1967"



Ipsita Dey, "Home on the Fijian Farmscape: Agricultural Attachments to Land and Place"

I am an anthropologist whose work is at the intersection of Pacific Island Studies, Indigeneity Studies, South Asian Diaspora Studies, Environmental Studies, and ethnographic ethics. My interdisciplinary research explores how Indo-Fijians articulate connections to land and country through agricultural practice, claiming a complex mode of diasporic nativity in response to resurgent Fijian indigenous ethno-nationalist politics. My dissertation explores how Indo-Fijians operationalize narratives of plantation labor and contemporary farmwork to produce a non-settler local identity that reconfigures

Providing a Supportive Scholarly Community

In the workshop I have forged beautiful friendships, a camaraderie of interest in works beyond my area of research and, above all, a reflexive and generous ethic of listening.

—**Navjit Kaur**
Graduate Student Fellow



Meeting each week in workshop gave me a cohort during the writing process, which can feel so isolating otherwise.

—**Eliav Grossman**
Graduate Student Fellow



The CCSR workshop is one of the most supportive environments I've been in at Princeton and is a great model of collegiality.

—**Emma Thompson**
Graduate Student Fellow



PEOPLE

relations between diaspora, indigeneity, and nationalism. Through multiple government coups and violent anti-Indian rhetoric, indigenous politics in Fiji has repeatedly attempted to render Indo-Fijians, whose ancestors arrived en masse to Fiji as indentured laborers to work on sugarcane plantations, alien to lands they consider home. Drawing from my ethnographic research among farmers in the Sigatoka Valley, I demonstrate how Indo-Fijians imagine farm practices as simultaneous projects in nation-building, heritage/traditional knowledge preservation, and environmental protection. Thus, Indo-Fijian farmers simultaneously mirror and challenge ethnonationalist interpretations of indigeneity to produce a local identity that protests the exclusivity of belonging in Fiji today.



Matthew Dowd, “Faith in Flux: Negotiating Modernity in the French Catholic World of the Nineteenth Century”

My dissertation explores how the globally influential French Catholic world worked out ideological, theological, and institutional responses to the twin challenges of capitalist transformation and mass politics in the 19th century. Questioning

scholarly interpretations of the period that emphasize the singular hostility of Catholics to European modernity, I underscore the debates Catholics had amongst themselves over whether and on what terms to engage with an increasingly secular society. While some Catholics adopted a hard-line position, utterly rejecting any compromise with liberal modernity, others—especially among the Catholic professional classes—pioneered creative and conciliatory institutions, theologies, and political strategies to the challenges of their age. Only by understanding these mid-century debates and their political ramifications can the later nineteenth and twentieth century histories of Catholic antiliberalism, “Catholic modernity”, and Christian Democracy come into focus. My work, by attending to intra-Catholic disagreements and zeroing in on institution-builders, offers a fresh and dynamic view of the Catholic world at a pivotal moment of political and economic change, when it felt like the future of the Catholic faith was at stake.



Matthieu Dutil, “Animism in Posthuman Contemporary French Literature: Re-voicing the Non-human Animal”

My research focuses on the presence of animist elements in

contemporary French literature, focusing primarily on the relationship between humans and non-human animals. While animism is a topic that has been studied at large in the field of anthropology, it is relatively new to use this concept in literature, particularly French. I argue that in the past 30 years, French and Francophone authors have been infusing their writing with tropes taken from non-Western worldviews, and how animism becomes a conceptual tool to criticize modernity and move into a postmodern world where humans and their environment live in symbiosis. My thesis is divided in three chapters, each one focusing on an author as well as on a specific ability—speech, sight, and mind—that have commonly been used to differentiate our species from others. The first chapter looks at how nature communicated by analyzing how Bernard Werber includes elements of animism and Biosemiotics—the creation, reception, and interpretation of signs in the natural world—in his novels. The second focuses on the animal gaze in Wajdi Mouawad’s *Anima* and shows what we can learn when looking at the world from a new perspective, a point of view that has been contested by many. Finally, the third chapter focuses on the animal mind in Nastassja Martin’s *Croire aux fauves*. Read alongside her anthropological books, the novel shows how intricate her traumatic encounter with a bear in Siberia is internally, rather than just physically.

Eliav Grossman, “The New Mishnah: Rabbinic Literature between Late Antiquity and Early Islam”



My dissertation focuses on a period which scholars agree is of immense importance to the formation of rabbinic culture, but which has so far been treated as a “dark age” unattested by our sources. I make the case that there is a distinctive corpus of texts which can offer us a new perspective on the rabbis’ transformation in the late Byzantine and early Islamic period from a loose collective of sages to a cultural juggernaut. Texts such as the so-called “minor” Talmudic tractates, the *Baraita de-Niddah*, the *Ma’asim of Erez Israel*, and the synagogue inscription from *Rehov* are rarely studied together (some of them rarely studied at all), but I show they all share particular literary characteristics: they all imitate the style of the third-century foundational document of rabbinic literature, the Mishnah, and attribute statements only to Mishnaic sages, even though they were composed centuries later. The dissertation interrogates the classicizing edifice of this corpus—that I call New Mishnah—showing that it is belied by the texts’ participation in new discourses on textuality, identity, and community which emerge in the first centuries of Islamic rule.



Rebekah Haigh, “Scripting Identity: (En)Gendering Violence in Early Judaism”

Today, the relationship between religious rhetoric and violent action remains hotly debated. The study of the ancient world offers a place to reconsider the concept of religious violence in a context that challenges modern western categories and suppositions. My dissertation approaches the question “what is religious violence?” from a new angle: not just as choosing to kill (or die) but also as ritual practices involving writing and reading about violence. As I argue, ritual violence is a potent site for the formation of militant Jewish selfhood, especially when acts of violence are anticipated, even embodied, in a liturgical reading context. The project focuses on two case studies from the first centuries BCE and CE: the War Scroll, a military manual from the community that produced the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Book of Revelation, an apocalypse from the early Jesus-movement. Both communities responded to Roman colonialism (and local Jewish collaboration) with literary fantasies that anticipated holy war. The rhetorical violence of the manual and the apocalypse—with their embedded prayers,

revenge fantasies, and rubrics for communal warfare—belong to an ancient landscape where, as John Austin put it, words do things. Adapting work from embodied cognition and ritual studies, the dissertation explores how imaginative communal rituals, including prayer, shape the self-perception of the listening audience and invite its participation in violent speech acts understood to have ritual potency. This dissertation complicates long-standing models of non-violence in the Book of Revelation by revealing how ritually coded scripts for eschatological war could construct and legitimize Jewish audience members as ritual agents of violence and potential contributors to violence in the present.



Hasan Hameed, “The Ethics of Erotics: The reception of Persian literature and the making of Islam in colonial India”

Medieval Persian writers such as Rumi (d. 1273) and Sa’di (d. 1292) were central to Muslim literary, scholarly, and everyday life in South Asia. Sa’di’s *Gulistan*, in fact, was perhaps the most widely read book in the Muslim world after the Quran. For centuries, it was considered a textbook of Islamic ethics and the Persian language, studied by



Hasan Hameed and Jonathan Brown

Muslims and by Hindus and other non-Muslims in India. It was also considered, along with other texts such as Rumi’s *Mathnawi* and Jami’s *Yusuf wa Zulaykha*, a repository of religious and mystical insight. As the British took over India in the nineteenth century, however, they declared such Perso-Islamic texts ‘erotic’ and deemed them to be unsuitable for the curricula of indigenous and colonial schools. Earlier historians have held that these texts became marginalized and Victorian attitudes of prudery regarding sex and rejection of homoeroticism were absorbed by colonized Muslim intellectuals in India. My dissertation challenges this narrative by exploring two neglected archives: premodern manuscripts of Persian commentaries on the *Gulistan* produced in India; and nineteenth-century printings of the *Gulistan*, its commentaries, and its translations into English and vernacular Indian languages. I show that early modern Muslims engaged sexual themes based on a certain ethical framework or *adab*. Failing to recognize this ethics of erotics, Orientalists systematically removed and mistranslated passages from English versions of the *Gulistan*;

colonial officials removed them from textbooks. Yet, my dissertation shows that the premodern Persian tradition of engaging Persian texts not only survived but thrived into the nineteenth century. Moreover, it continued to be engaged not just by Muslims but also by significant numbers of Hindus and other non-Muslims. Through research in multiple languages—including Arabic, Persian, and Urdu—and through close attention to the material, visual, and textual features of manuscripts and prints, my dissertation brings to light new histories of Islam, gender, and Persian literature in colonial India.

Manav Kapur, “Bounding Nations, Making Citizens: Partition, Property and Citizenship in Postcolonial South Asia (1947-1965)”



Navjit Kaur, “The Rope of Allah: Ethical Striving between Financial and National futures in Malerkotla, Indian Punjab”

Since 2014, as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) became the ruling government in India, the country has been undergoing two simultaneous yet contradictory phenomena. On the one hand, the ruling government, with the help of international

and national NGOs, has been steadfastly linking the unbanked poor population of the country to banking facilities, a staggering growth that found India’s name in the Guinness Book of World Records (NYT 2018, Indian Express 2015). On the other hand, with the introduction of a new Citizenship bill that renders 14% of the Muslim Population without citizenship, many have argued that this is not only the end of times for Muslims in India (Ibrahim 2020) but also India’s descent into hate and beginning of Muslim genocide (Ayub 2021, Srivastava 2020). My dissertation project foregrounds the gendered Muslim subject to ask: how do Muslim women inhabit, contest and navigate these uncertain futures of financial empowerment and national belonging where existential and economic futures get intertwined? As they straddle two different forms of uncertainties initiated by the neoliberal market and the rising violence against Muslims, my ethnographic description of such lives from within the town of Malerkotla, argues that Muslim women, through the everyday forms of ethical as well as economic labors provide a critique of both feminist-financial futures and violent futures of untethering national belonging. In doing so, they articulate Islam and being Muslim beyond the frozen binaries of theology and secularism that divest Islam of movement and change. Instead, the dissertation describes how Muslim women envisage, express and perform the ethical worlds within the everyday when futures oscillate between neoliberal promises of salvation and conspiratorial endings of national belonging. Thus, my

dissertation takes a novel, holistic approach where the religious and the economic are not treated as separate wholes. Instead, in providing a fine-grained analysis of various intermeshed and competing views of futures, my dissertation research describes the shifting valences of being a gendered economic-national subject where religion both affords and obstructs certain futures in the contemporary. In ethnographically describing the religious and economic worlds these women have to live within contemporary India, I argue that Muslim women expand the concept of labor as both a moral and economic striving to make the everyday inhabitable in such uncertain times.



Sinae Kim, “Preaching Buddhism in Medieval China: Sutra Lecture Texts and Performance”

This dissertation examines the practice of “popular preaching” (*sujiang* 俗講) performed by itinerant monks to disseminate Buddhist doctrines among lay people in seventh- to tenth-century China. In contrast to existing studies on the propagation of Buddhism through the lenses of translation and commentary, I highlight the crucial role preaching played in familiarizing the laity with

Buddhist concepts in their everyday lives. Instead of relying on the normative depictions of preachers as commonly found in hagiographical sources, my dissertation investigates the lived presence of preachers and the dynamics of their preaching by examining some thirty manuscripts of “sutra lecture texts” (*jiangjing wen* 講經文) discovered from a Dunhuang Mogao Cave. In addition, it constructs a fresh account of popular preaching with textual and historical data culled from such complementary sources as scriptures, commentaries, travelogues, and ritual manuscripts. The dissertation unfolds in three parts. Part One analyzes how preachers worked with both canonical and non-canonical sources by resorting to a diverse range of literary and exegetical techniques. Part Two reconstructs the ritual and performative dimensions of preaching, as indicated by the paratextual and material features of the manuscripts. Part Three, finally, showcases the thematic and philosophical emphasis of the preachers’ messages to their lay audience. Altogether, my dissertation adds historical nuance to the broader questions of homiletics, canonicity, materiality, and salvation by elucidating the multifaceted roles played by popular preaching in medieval China.

Albert Kohn, “God’s Day of Rest: Jews, Christians and the Sabbath in High Medieval Europe”

Of the many sacred days in the medieval calendar, the Sabbath was by far the most frequent. It constituted a weekly respite from work and an



embrace of sacred concerns. There was not just a single Sabbath in medieval European towns, however. Both Jews and Christians sanctified one day each week: Jews, Saturday; and Christians, Sunday—laying the framework for the late nineteenth-century innovation of “the weekend.” Although a continuous fixture of religious and civic life, the Sabbath’s pre-modern formation and influence remains obscure. My doctoral project fills this gap by illuminating how high-medieval Jews and Christians in northern France understood and integrated divinely mandated rest into their bustling, urban lives. It examines how rival understandings and traditions of the Sabbath shaped one another and determined how medieval urban-dwellers engaged in rest.



Mélena Laudig, “‘Her Country’s Children’: African American Religion

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and Childhood in Slavery and Freedom”

My dissertation documents how religious institutions, communities, and discourses shaped the historical experiences of Black American children during the periods of slavery and freedom. Examining oral histories, school and orphanage records, antislavery print culture, and more, the project demonstrates the critical roles of African American children within the African-descended religious systems of nineteenth-century enslaved and free Black communities. Furthermore, it reveals how nineteenth-century religious groups mobilized ideas of Black childhood in order to push for slavery’s end. Ultimately, this interdisciplinary study demonstrates the co-constitution of childhood, race, and religion in the nineteenth century and highlights Black children as central figures who shaped American religion and politics during the period.



Nura Liepsner, “Muslim Ethics of Power: Feminist Thought in Late Ottoman Discourse”

My dissertation project analyzes the works of feminist thinkers engaging in late Ottoman theological debates. By drawing from the works of prominent Muslim feminists active

between 1880 and 1930, I ask how and when Muslim ethics were leveraged to support the survival and the simultaneous revival of women’s ability to embody religious authority. I argue that, during the Nahda, Islam and its ongoing reforms served as an avenue to reimagine justice and belonging within the nexus of colonial conflict, empire, and the nation state. By analyzing the ambiguity with which late Ottoman feminists navigated their gendered identities, religious convictions, and political affiliations, this dissertation considers negotiations of religious authority for communities that are routinely imagined beyond the pale of humanistic thought.



Omri Matarasso, “Mountains of Revelation: The Awgen Tradition and the Confessionalization of Mesopotamia in Late Antiquity”

My dissertation offers a study of rural monastic networks in a period of momentous geo-political shifts across the Middle East. Based on hagiographical narratives and monastic histories, many of which remain unpublished and in manuscript form, my research reconfigures our understanding of the increasingly diverse confessional landscape of the medieval Middle East. I argue that a better understanding of the

rural settings, intellectual horizons, and myth-making efforts underlying Mesopotamian monastic networks uncovers a hitherto unexplored Christian tradition whose salvific intellectual heritage exchanged theological precisions for ecumenical, cross-confessional mysticism. My dissertation consequently shows how supposedly secluded mountain communities across northern Mesopotamia participated in both the medieval formation of Middle Eastern Christianity and the broader history of cross-religious exchange and interregional connectivity of people and ideas in a global Middle Ages.



Aleksander Musial, “Immersion: Eastern European transformations of hygiene architecture, ca. 1610-1830”

My dissertation explores eighteenth-century bathing architecture in Eastern Europe and its impact across the continent. During this period, the region witnessed unprecedented developments in hygiene infrastructure, thanks to a network of artists active in Russia, Poland-Lithuania, and the Habsburg Empire. Eastern European baths, whose forms and functions simultaneously evoked Ottoman and Graeco-Roman counterparts, reveal the ideological tensions that surfaced within Russian

and Polish-Lithuanian societies as they negotiated their fluctuating positions between the Orient and the Occident. Based on the close study of drawings, structures, and their reception, my analysis of this little acknowledged contribution will shed light on the emergence of the modern concept of hygiene and the new bodily models it generated.



My dissertation offers a literary history of the medieval curfew law. This dissertation examines the way the disciplinary power of medieval curfew regulations structured social time and gave form to some of the most complex literary works from medieval England.



Jae Pi, “The Possibilities and Limitations of Hermeneutics: Vasubandhu’s Buddhist Hermeneutics from the *Vyākhyāyukti*”

My dissertation delves into Buddhist hermeneutics and pedagogy through the case of a renowned Indian scholar-monk Vasubandhu who lived between the 4-5th century. Through an analysis of his treatise detailing how to be a good exegete, I seek to understand what constitutes correct and pedagogically meaningful interpretations for Buddhists studying and teaching Buddhism in monastic educational institutions of the past. I draw insights from Buddhist hermeneutic and pedagogic theories and methods to reflect on what we do with texts in modern, secular educational contexts.

Jordan Skinner, “Medieval Curfew: Poetic Space and the Governance of Time”



Jeremy Stitts, “How the West was Won: Emperors, Bishops, and the Creation of Christian Capitals”

My dissertation focuses on location and power within the late antique Roman world. Frontier metropolises such as Trier, Milan, and Sirmium became imperial capitals (*sedes imperii*) in which resided late Roman emperors. The presence and divine authority of these emperors strengthened the martial, economic, and political aspects of their regions. Consequently, the clergy of these cities competed over the residency of the emperors in the fourth and

early fifth centuries CE. This competition over imperial favor within specific locales shaped how certain areas of the late Roman Empire were Christianized. The emperors, in conjunction with bishops, determined the trajectory of Christianity through these imperial capitals, solidifying Nicene orthodoxy as the victorious Christology of the Roman and post-Roman world. I use Trier as a case study of how one particular late Roman imperial capital was an engine of Christianization. I argue the reason why Christianity solidified in the west was due to the imperial implementation of multiple capitals to address the need for various zones of imperial presence. This restructuring of the Roman state through administrative divisioning unintentionally helped Christians throughout the empire hammer out their own doctrines, determine heresy, and create opportunities for proselytizing. In Trier, we can see how Rome’s long-term negotiation of imperial power transformed into a negotiation of Christian orthodoxy.



Junbin Tan, “Designing Familiar Futures: Aging, Lived Religion, and Digitized Tradition at Postwar Kinmen”

This dissertation examines the ways by which older adults on Kinmen,

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Taiwan create political futures at the politically-volatile Taiwan Strait through historical legends, ritual improvisations, and their archiving. Through ethnographic research on Kinmen from 2020 to 2023, Tan examines the ways by which temple festivals, domestic rituals, and the archiving of religious traditions are taken up by one generation of Kinmenese—born in the 1960s and 1970s—as ways of articulating their visions for Kinmen and the Taiwan Strait. He examines issues such as how attachments to place develop within religious cosmologies, how ritual economies are reproduced through transformation, and how documentation through digital media operates to produce semblances of stable futures in politically volatile times. In doing so, he contributes to research on aging and religion, the mediatization of religion, and how religious practices and their transformation into “intangible cultural heritage” take shape within and intervene in regional politics.



Constantine Theodoridis, “The Sultans’ Promise: European-Ottoman Relations from Rituals to Rights (1590-1740)”

During the early modern period, the Capitulations—quasi-treaties issued

in a unilateral style by the Ottoman chancery—formed the legal basis of European trade, diplomacy, and missionary activity in the Ottoman Empire. The Sultans’ Promise argues that behind this unilateral style and its ceremonial trappings, a dynamic set of trans-imperial practices transformed the capitulations in the span of the long seventeenth century. It traces how rituals, networking, trade, the rise of new Ottoman elites, and the proliferation of new archival practices reshaped the capitulations as a mutually respected language of international law. The Sultans’ Promise offers a blueprint to address the historiographic imbalances caused by the paucity of Ottoman sources on European affairs, by reading the evolution of these trans-imperial practices as an alternative archive. Finally, this dissertation argues that rituals traditionally associated with a distinctive Ottoman/Muslim conception of foreign policy were constructed in conversation with European diplomatic idioms of the late Renaissance.



Emma Thompson, “Indian Secularism and the Muslim Other: Attitudes towards Religion in Indian Queer Activism”

My dissertation draws on online and in-person ethnographic work

with two queer activist organizations in northern India as case studies to analyze the ways they deploy the languages of secularism in order to understand the relationship between religion and queer activism. In using the term “languages of secularism” I move away from a state-focused approach to secularism studies to instead ask how the tropes and discourses surrounding secularism, like a notion of tolerance based in an underlying claim to common humanity or the insistence that religious differences are simultaneously trivial and immutable, figure in the work of queer activists. Central to my use of the term is the acknowledgment that these tropes and discourses are inconsistent and even at times contradictory. Comparing the two groups’ usage of the languages of secularism helps uncover the ways that secularism impacts both religious and non-religiously affiliated groups and illuminates how the tropes surrounding secularism impact activists’ relationship to religion. Furthermore, I situate both organizations within the context of rising Hindu nationalism in India. While both groups draw on languages of secularism in their activism to combat Hindu nationalism, invoking secularism poses different risks given their differing relationships to religion.

Liya Xie, “In the Shadows of Rationality: Epistemic Fringes and Multiple ‘Easts’ in the Making of Russian Modernity, 1880s-1920s”

My dissertation project examines Russian Orientalism between the 1880s and the 1920s by



reconstructing how Eastern-inspired “pseudo-scientific” and marginalized knowledge constituted an integral part of the search for answers to the looming crisis of values in fin-de-siècle Russian society. The main argument is that “the East” is much more than a linguistic or geographical category, but rather an epistemological category that a) facilitated disciplinary demarcation in the age of positivism and scientific rationality, and b) served as an intellectual resource for addressing the crisis of modernity. In other words, the East as a conceptual category played an instrumental role in the construction of what “modern” religion and “scientific” medicine are in the Russian context. Thinking along these lines, I argue, enriches the dialogue on Russian Orientalism, which is indebted to Edward Said’s scholarship but also limited by it. By incorporating methodological insights from the fields of history of knowledge, religious studies, and medical humanities, my work conceptualizes the multiple “Easts” not only as ideas and discourses but also as objects and practices, or embodied ideas. Each chapter will examine the following case studies: 1) Tibetan medicine in St. Petersburg, 2) Tibetan, Chinese medicine and shamanic healing in

Siberia and the Far East, 3) kumys therapy (fermented mare milk drink from the steppes), 4) vegetarianism, yoga, and its links with Tolstoyans and Russian Theosophists, 5) Occult Healing, Self-Development, and Awakening (engagement with Western and Eastern esotericisms).



Hanruo Zhang, “Bridging The Other World: Pure Land Buddhism And Literati Culture In Song Dynasty China (960–1276)”

The Song Dynasty (960-1279) witnessed significant transitions in Pure Land Buddhism, with the rising literati class playing a crucial role in reshaping this religious tradition. This dissertation contextualizes these changes within the Buddhist resurgence following the Huichang Persecution (841-845) and the political turmoil of the 10th century. By examining the transformation of Pure Land belief and its interaction with literati culture from four perspectives—social organization, cultural paradigm, print technology, and anthologization practice—this project sheds light on the complex dynamics that shaped the development of Pure Land Buddhism during this period. The dissertation investigates the popularization of Pure Land teachings through the lens of community organization, focusing on

the West Lake Lotus Society established by the monk Xingchang in the late 10th century. It also explores how Song literati constructed and adapted the myth of Huiyuan and his “White Lotus Society” to make Pure Land teachings culturally appealing and socially acceptable among their class. The study further analyzes the significant role of lay Buddhists, particularly Wang Gu and Wang Rixiu, in composing and circulating proselytizing texts that simplified and restructured Pure Land doctrines for a broader audience. Finally, it examines the first anthology of Pure Land texts, the *Lebang wenlei* (Categories of Writings on the Blissful Land), compiled by the Tiantai monk Zongxiao in 1200 CE, highlighting his pioneering efforts to establish Pure Land Buddhism as a distinct and legitimate tradition. Employing a combination of social network analysis, textual analysis, and literary-historical analysis, this dissertation offers new insights into the popularization of Buddhism, religious shifts within the Tang-Song transition framework, and religious-literary writings of Song literati. By analyzing the reciprocal influence between literati culture and the Pure Land tradition, this dissertation seeks to complicate current academic narratives and offer a more complex and multifaceted understanding of the interaction between religion and literati culture.

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Media Team

- Lucia Filipova
- Lauren K. McCormick
- Camilla Pletuhina-Tonev
- Aliya Ram
- Junbin Tan
- Suzanne van Geuns

Executive Committee

The Center is administered by an interdepartmental faculty committee appointed to rotating terms by the Dean of the Faculty. The committee sets policy for the Center and serves as the review and selection committee for applications to the Center, including those for its conferences and lecture series, graduate student fellows, and undergraduate course funding.

André Benhaïm is Professor of French and Italian. His main areas of research and teaching are 20th-century French prose literature and culture and Francophone literature and culture from North Africa and the Mediterranean. Particularly interested in questions of identity and representation, and the relation between ethics and aesthetics, he also focuses on the relationship between “canonical” literature, contemporary works, and “popular culture.” A Proust scholar, he is the author most recently of *Après Ulysse. Vers une poétique de l’hospitalité en Méditerranée* (2021), an essay on the Mediterranean as a space of passages and transformations, from Homer to the present.

Wallace Best is the Hughes-Rogers Professor of Religion and African American Studies in the Department of Religion, is a faculty affiliate of the Department of History, and serves as Director of the Program in Gender and Sexuality Studies. A scholar of African American religious history, he is the author of *Passionately Human, No Less Divine: Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952*, and *Langston’s Salvation: American Religion and the Bard of Harlem*, winner of the 2018 award in “Textual Studies” from the American Academy of Religion. He is currently at work on a book entitled, “The Spiritual Capital of Black America: Harlem’s World of Religion and Churches,” under contract with New York University Press.

Patricia Fernández-Kelly is Professor of Sociology and Research Associate at the Office of Population Research. She is also the director of the Center for Migration and Development. Fernández-Kelly is a social anthropologist with an interest in international economic development, gender, class and ethnicity, and urban ethnography. Her latest book is *The Hero’s Fight: African Americans in West Baltimore and the Shadow of the State* (2016) and she is currently working on a book entitled *Hialeah Dreams: The Making of the Cuban-American Working Class in South Florida*.

Jonathan C. Gold is Professor in the Department of Religion and Director of CCSR. A scholar of Indian and Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, he is especially interested in Buddhist approaches to meaning, ethics,

language and learning. He is the author of *Paving the Great Way: Vasubandhu’s Unifying Buddhist Philosophy* (2015). He is currently developing a Buddhist approach to politics and social thought.

Beatrice Kitzinger is Assistant Professor of Art and Archaeology. Her research examines intersections of artistic media, of pictorial and liturgical space, and of historical, eschatological, and ritual time primarily in manuscript illumination between the eighth and tenth centuries.

Bryan Lowe, Assistant Professor of Religion, specializes in Buddhism in ancient Japan (seventh through ninth centuries) and has broader research interests in ritual, manuscript studies, historiography, canons, and the religion of non-elites. Lowe’s first book, *Ritualized Writing: Buddhist Practice and Scriptural Cultures in Ancient Japan*, received the John Whitney Hall Book Prize from the Association of Asian Studies. He is currently working on a new book that combines manuscript and archaeological evidence to consider the role of preaching and ritual in the spread of Buddhism to the Japanese provinces.

Seth Perry is Associate Professor of Religion. He is interested in American religious history, with a particular focus on print culture and religious authority. Perry’s first book, *Bible Culture and Authority in the Early United States* (2018) explores the performative, rhetorical, and material aspects of bible-based authority in early-national America. Current

projects include a biography of Lorenzo Dow, the early-national period's most famous itinerant preacher; an article on "scriptural failure"; and a project on animals in early American religious history.

Sarah Rivett is Professor of English and American Studies. She works at the intersection of early American and Atlantic literature and Indigenous studies. She is the author of *The Science of the Soul in Colonial New England* (2011) and *Unscripted America: Indigenous Languages and the Origins of a Literary Nation* (2017). She has published articles on religion, witchcraft, Enlightenment, gender and conversion, and early American historiography. Her articles include studies of Native American language texts, colonial-Indigenous language encounters, and the impact of Indigenous languages on 18th-century religious and intellectual culture. She is currently writing a book on the raven as a literary symbol from the Book of Genesis to Edgar Allan Poe and from the classical stories of the Haida, Tlingit and other Indigenous literatures of the Pacific West to contemporary Indigenous theorizations of the raven as a metaphor for social justice. Tentatively titled "Raven's Land", this book rereads American literary history through raven stories that contest U.S. settler colonialism by disrupting origin myths and exceptionalist temporalities.

Jack Tannous is Associate Professor of History and Hellenic Studies and Chair of the Center for the Study of Late Antiquity. He is interested in the cultural history of the eastern

Mediterranean, especially the Middle East, in the Late Antique and early medieval period. His research focuses on the Syriac-speaking Christian communities of the Near East in this period, but he is interested in a number of other, related areas, including Eastern Christian Studies more broadly, Patristics/early Christian studies, Greco-Syriac and Greco-Arabic translation, Christian-Muslim interactions, sectarianism and identity, early Islamic history, the history of the Arabic Bible, and the Quran. He is also interested in manuscripts and the editing of Syriac and Arabic (especially Christian Arabic) texts. He is working on a book entitled *Lovers of Labor at the End of the Ancient World: Syriac Scholars Between Byzantium and Islam*.

Moulie Vidas is Associate Professor of Religion and the Program in Judaic Studies. His recent publications include *Tradition and the Formation of the Talmud* (Princeton University Press, 2014) and a collection of essays, co-edited with Catherine Chin, titled *Late Ancient Knowing: Explorations in Intellectual History* (University of California Press, 2015). He serves on the editorial boards of the book series *Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism* and *The Journal of Religion in the Roman Empire*. He is currently working on a book titled *The Emergence of Talmudic Culture: Scholarship and Religion in Late Ancient Palestine*.

Jenny Wiley Legath is Associate Director of the Center and served as Acting Director for the 2019-2020 academic year. She specializes in

American religious history, focusing on gender from the nineteenth century to the present. Her first book, *Sanctified Sisters: A History of Protestant Deaconesses*, was released by New York University Press in 2019. Her new project addresses carrying firearms as religious practice. She sits with the Committee as a non-voting member.

Faculty Associates

Faculty Associates are members of the University faculty who have expressed particular interest in the activities of the Center and who help advise Center staff about relevant activities and interests in their respective departments. Complete descriptions of their publications and research and teaching interests are available from the Center's website for students interested in knowing more about faculty resources in the study of religion.

Christopher Achen is the Roger Williams Straus Professor of Social Sciences, Emeritus and Professor of Politics, Emeritus.

Leora Batnitzky is the Ronald O. Perelman Professor of Jewish Studies and Professor of Religion. Her teaching and research interests include philosophy of religion, modern Jewish thought, hermeneutics, and contemporary legal and political theory.

John Borneman is Professor of Anthropology. With regard to religious studies, he explores the displacement of the sacred in and through secular processes.

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D. Graham Burnett is Professor of History. His interests include the history of natural history and the sciences of the earth and the sea from the 17th through the 19th centuries.

Michael Cadden is Senior Lecturer in Theater, and Chair in the Peter B. Lewis Center for the Creative and Performing Arts. His areas of interest include modern and contemporary theater, Shakespeare in performance, and Australian literature and theater.

Michael Cook is Class of 1943 University Professor of Near Eastern Studies. His focus is the formation of Islamic civilization and the role played by religious values in that process.

Rafaela Dancygier is Professor of Politics and International Affairs. She researches the domestic consequences of international immigration, the incorporation of immigrants, the political representation of ethnic minorities, and the determinants of ethnic conflict.

Mitchell Duneier is Professor of Sociology and Chair, Department of Sociology. He is the author most recently of *Ghetto: The Invention of a Place, the History of an Idea*.

Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi is Professor of Near Eastern Studies. Currently, he is working on a project on Mystical Modernity, a comparative study of philosophy of history and political theory of Walter Benjamin and Ali Shariati.

Eddie S. Gaude Jr. is James S. McDonnell Distinguished University

Professor of African American Studies. His research interests include American pragmatism and African American religious history and its place in American public life.

Anthony Grafton is Henry Putnam University Professor of History. His interests lie in the cultural history of Renaissance Europe, the history of books and readers, the history of scholarship and education in the West from Antiquity to the 19th century, and the history of science from Antiquity to the Renaissance.

Eric Gregory is Professor of Religion. His interests include religious and philosophical ethics, theology, political theory, law and religion, and the role of religion in public life.

Jonathan Gribetz is Associate Professor in the Department of Near Eastern Studies and in the Program in Judaic Studies. He researches the history of Zionism, Palestine, Israel, Jerusalem, and nationalism in the modern Middle East.

Olga P. Hasty is Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures. She devotes herself primarily to poets of the nineteenth century and the modernist period (e.g. Pushkin, Pavlova, Pasternak, and Tsvetaeva).

Amaney Jamal is Edwards S. Sanford Professor of Politics. Her areas of specialization are the Middle East and North Africa, mass and political behavior, political development and democratization, inequality and economic segregation, Muslim Immigration (US and Europe), gender, race, religion, and class.

Michael Jennings is Class of 1900 Professor of Modern Languages and Professor of German. His research and teaching focus on 20th century European literature, photography, and cultural theory.

Eve Krakowski is Assistant Professor of Near Eastern Studies and the Program in Judaic Studies. She focuses on social history of the medieval Middle East, with particular interest in women's history, family history, and the history of religious practice.

Christina Lee is Associate Professor of Spanish and Portuguese. Her research examines Hispanic-Asian forms of religious devotions in the Spanish Philippines during the early colonial period.

Hendrik Lorenz is Professor of Philosophy. His research centers on Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics and Plotinus, focusing on issues in (moral) psychology and epistemology.

Carolina Mangone is Assistant Professor of Art and Archaeology. She specializes in southern Renaissance and Baroque art and is currently researching Gianlorenzo Bernini, the "Michelangelo of his age".

Meredith Martin is Associate Professor of English. She specializes in anglophone poetry, historical prosody, historical poetics, poetry and public culture, and disciplinary and pedagogical history.

Jan-Werner Müller is the Roger Williams Straus Professor of Social

Sciences and Professor of Politics. His research interests include the history of modern political thought, liberalism and its critics, constitutionalism, religion and politics, and the normative dimensions of European integration.

Chika Okeke-Agulu is Professor of Art and Archaeology. He specializes in African and African Diaspora art and visual cultures, with a particular interest in the history of modernism in Africa and the intersection of art and politics in modern and contemporary art.

Elaine Pagels is Harrington Spear Paine Foundation Professor of Religion. She has published widely on Gnosticism and early Christianity and continues to pursue research interests in late antiquity.

Sara S. Poor is Professor of German. Her primary research interests are in the areas of Gender Studies and medieval German literature.

Jamie Reuland is Assistant Professor of Music. Her work focuses on music of the later Middle Ages: song, language, and philosophies of music.

Lauren Coyle Rosen is Assistant Professor of Anthropology. Her research and teaching interests lie at the intersections of legal and political anthropology, comparative religion and spirituality, aesthetics and consciousness, subjectivity and epistemology, and critical theory.

Carolyn Rouse is the Ritter Professor of Anthropology. Her work

explores the use of evidence to make particular claims about race and social inequality.

Marina Rustow is Khedouri A. Zilkha Professor of Jewish Civilization in the Near East. She is a social historian of the medieval Middle East, who works primarily with sources from the Cairo Geniza.

Esther Schor is Leonard L. Milberg '53 Professor of American Jewish Studies and Professor of English. She is a poet and founding Chair of the Committee on American Jewish Studies. Her teaching interests include British Romanticism and literature, Scripture, and religion.

Teresa Shawcross is Associate Professor of History and Hellenic Studies. She is a historian of the Byzantine Empire and the Mediterranean World in the Middle Ages who is currently studying medieval theories and practices of empire.

Nigel Smith is William and Annie S. Paton Foundation Professor of Ancient and Modern Literature. His interests include poetry, poetic theory, the social role of literature, literature, politics and religion.

Barbara White is Professor of Music. She is a chamber music composer whose scholarly writings address the coordination between sound and image, the relationship between creative activity and everyday life, and the impact on music of gender, listening and spirituality.

Tamsen Wolff is Associate Professor of English. She specializes in modern and contemporary drama and performance, gender studies, cultural studies, voice, directing, and dramaturgy.

Muhammad Qasim Zaman is Robert H. Niehaus '77 Professor of Near Eastern Studies and Religion. His research interests include religious authority in classical, medieval, and modern Islam; history of Islamic law in the Middle East and in late medieval and modern South Asia; learning in Islam; Islamic political thought; and contemporary religious and political movements in the Muslim world.

Advisory Council

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Staff

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Director
- Jenny Wiley Legath,**
Associate Director
- Jennifer Hemingway,**
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Center Events

Throughout the year, the Center sponsored many public lectures, discussions and symposia this year. We were able to return to hosting most events in person, many with an accompanying livestream. These events attracted the interest of students, faculty, and the wider community. Video recordings of most events are available on the Center's website. In addition to financial support from Princeton University, the Center's public events are funded through a variety of sources. Full sponsorship information is available on our website.

September 13, 2023

"The Sex Obsession" Religion and the Public Conversation with Janet Jakobsen, Barnard College, and Emma Thompson, Princeton University

Religion is a force to be reckoned with in political debates over sex, but Janet Jakobsen decisively breaks

with the common sense that religion and sex are the fixed binary of American political life. She instead follows the kaleidoscopic ways in which sexual politics are embedded in social relations of all kinds—not

only the intimate relations of love and family with which gender and sex are routinely associated, but also secularism, freedom, race, disability, capitalism, nation and state, housing and the environment. In this conversation, Prof. Jakobsen was interviewed by Graduate Student Fellow Emma Thompson.



September 15, 2023

“Soil & Light” A Poetry Reading at the Princeton Theological Seminary Farminary with authors Tess Taylor and Camille Dungy, moderated by Jason Myers



September 22

“Thinking Through Minshū Bukkyō: Popular Buddhism and the Study of Premodern Japan” Conference organized by Bryan Lowe, Department of Religion, and Kikuchi Hiroki, University of Tokyo, with a keynote lecture, “Oath as Archive: Kishōmon and the Study of Popular Buddhism

in Premodern Japan” by Max Moerman, Columbia University

September 28

“Public Scholarship as Storytelling” Toolkit workshop with David Dault, Loyola University of Chicago

In a rapidly evolving academic landscape, the role of public scholarship has gained increasing importance. Too often, however, scholars are trained to communicate in ways that differ from how the public has learned to hear. The skills of storytelling can help bridge that divide. In this workshop, which was geared toward the Media Team but also attracted students and faculty beyond the Center, scholar and media figure David Dault guided participants in how to think about translating their work into narrative structures, using dramatic tension and release to engage and captivate their audiences. The group also explored sustainable strategies to

build public scholarship into their ongoing research.

September 29

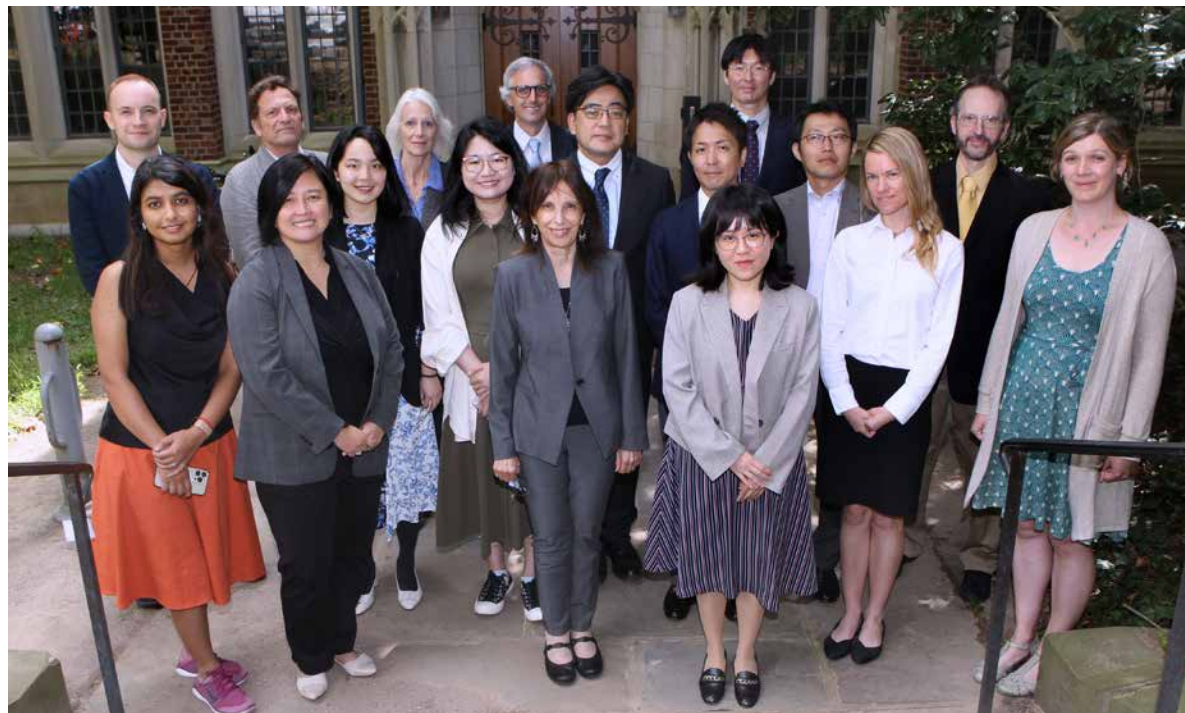
Black Buddhism Faculty Project Workshop

The purpose of the workshop was to discuss the promise of, and to strategize around supports for, the academic study of Black Buddhism, meaning Black-identified persons engaging with Buddhism practically and/or intellectually. Friday was dedicated to thinking through topics, with panelists either presenting or helping to facilitate discussion. Saturday was a more hands-on practical planning session

October 3

“Missionary Approaches and Indigenous Responses: New France vs. New England” Lectures by Emma Anderson, University of Ottawa, and David D. Hall, Harvard Divinity School

Participants in the “Thinking Through Minshū Bukkyō” conference



CENTER EVENTS

October 4

“Disability, Embodiment and the Limits of Knowledge” Religion and the Public Conversation with Sarah Imhoff, Indiana University, Bloomington, and Lauren K. McCormick, Princeton University

In this discussion with Visiting Fellow Lauren McCormick, Professor Imhoff highlighted the complicated and at times conflicting connections between the body, queerness, disability, religion, and nationalism within and beyond the story of Jessie Sampter.

October 6

“Righting the American Dream: How the Media Mainstreamed Reagan’s Evangelical Vision” Diane Winston, University of Southern California Annenberg School for

Communication and Journalism, and Rachel Brown-Weinstock, Princeton University

Diane Winston discussed with Graduate Fellow Rachel Brown-Weinstock her recent book, a provocative new history of how the news media facilitated the Reagan Revolution and the rise of the religious Right.

October 26

“Vodou en Vogue” Religion and the Public Conversation with Eziaku Nwokocha, University of Miami, Manbo Maude Evans, and Mélena Laudig

Professor Nwokocha is the author of a new book about the vibrant connections between the spirits and Black Vodou practitioners’ lives, manifest in the dynamic relationship



Emma Anderson spent the Fall semester at Princeton as the Pathy Visiting Professor of Canadian Studies and held a conversation with David Hall on their overlapping research projects on seventeenth-century missionization strategies and assumptions of Protestant New Englanders and Catholics of New France.

Participants in the Black Buddhism Faculty Project





Sarah Imhoff

between public religious ceremonies, material aesthetics, bodily adornment, and spirit possession. In this lively conversation, Graduate Fellow Mélena Laudig interviewed both Eziaku Nwokocha and Nwokocha's primary interlocutor Manbo Maude Evans.

November 1

"History (Re)incarnate: George Eliot and Qurratulain Hyder" Victorian Colloquium lecture by Maha Jafri, Sewanee: The University of the South

Professor Jafri spoke to a multi- and interdisciplinary group of undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty about how New Testament-focused, Christian paradigms have overdetermined our readings of temporality in both George Eliot's novels and religion more broadly in the nineteenth-century. Using Hyder's *Aag Ka Darya (River of Fire, 1959/trans. 1998)* as a counter-study, Professor Jafri reread Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871) through Hyder's diachronic and re-incarnational time, suggesting that Eliot's novels, as well as her work with the Christian theologians and Indologists of her time, are structured by the messy physicality of incarnation: the

tension that arises when the divine, ideal, or abstract meets the material, real, and finite. The Victorian Colloquium is very grateful for the support of the Center for Culture, Society, and Religion for their help in making this event a success.

December 8

"Public Philosophy in Classical Greece: 470-370 BCE" Conference organized by Mirjam Kotwick, Department of Classics

The workshop was an essential part of the book project *Public Philosophy in Classical Greece: 470—370 BCE* (Cambridge University Press), co-edited by Mirjam Kotwick and Christopher Moore, Pennsylvania State University. The sourcebook's aim is to reframe the study of classical Greek philosophy by contending that essential material for reconstructing and assessing early philosophical debates—about, to name a few, the divine, norms of speaking, individual and social health—is to be found in authors beyond the usual canon

of Pre-socratics and Sophists and in texts written for a broader public, such as by historians, poets, orators, doctors, and music theorists, among others. All texts in the sourcebook are being newly translated by leading experts in the relevant fields. The workshop brought together our translators for collaboration on the volume, including Emily Baragwanath, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill; Richard Bett Johns Hopkins; Joel Mann, St. Norbert College; Robert Mayhew, Seton Hall University; David Murphy, New York University; Sarah Nooter, University of Chicago; Frances Pownall University of Alberta; Christopher Raymond, Vassar College; Evan Rodriguez, Idaho State University; Ruth Scodel, University of Michigan; and David Sider, New York University. In addition, we had two public talks by Victoria Wohl, University of Toronto, and Stephen White, University of Texas. These events were very well attended and received by graduate students and colleagues from classics, philosophy, and politics.



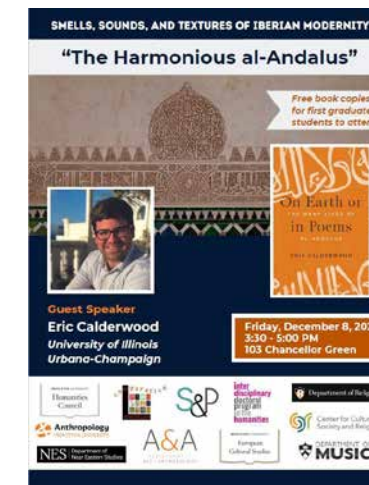
Right: Eziaku Nwokocha and Mélena Laudig

CENTER EVENTS

December 8

"The Harmonious al-Andalus" Lecture by Eric Calderwood, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, part of the Smells, Sounds, and Textures of Iberian Modernity lecture series, co-sponsored with the Department of Spanish and Portuguese

Drawing from his recent book entitled *On Earth or in Poems: The Many Lives of al-Andalus*, Professor Calderwood spoke to the connection between art, music, and the legacy of Al-Andalus in Moroccan contemporary culture.



February 1

"How to Win over a Journalist in 10 Minutes" a Toolkit Event with Maham Javaid, The Washington Post

Reporters scour the web every day for expert voices to support, explain or critique the main elements in their news stories. They are always on the lookout for relevant sources; this includes academics with a wide range of interests as well as those with specific, niche interests. In this Toolkit event, veteran journalist Maham Javaid shared practical tips



Andrea Jain

for how scholars should share their research and expertise with journalists, whether it's a ten-minute phone call or an hour-long interview.

February 15

"Buddhist Practice Theory and Animal Ethics" Yin-Cheng Distinguished Lecture in Buddhism by Janet Gyatso, Harvard Divinity School, with response by Brook Ziporyn, University of Chicago Divinity School. See full report on page 34-35.

February 28

"Into the Forever and Beautiful Sky': Confronting Animal Brutality in a Galaxy of Limitless Capitalism" Doll Family Lecture on Religion and Money by Andrea Jain, Indiana University Indianapolis

Andrea Jain asked, What happens when we show a film that pays worshipful attention to animal welfare to a Marvel Studios-sized audience? How does capitalism colonize the popular imagination, religious and otherwise? Lifting up

the *Guardians of the Galaxy vol. 3* as her primary artifact, Jain used the film to illustrate how capitalists sell animal ethics and why consumers buy it, arguing that confrontations with animal brutality get contained within and subsumed by capitalist realism, that is, a framework in which capitalism is deemed limitless and without viable alternatives, and gun capitalism, that is, the material and cultural condition of being flooded with guns, which are mass produced and sold as consumer products.

The Doll Lecture on Religion and Money was established in 2007 by Henry C. Doll '58 and his family. It reflects the family's longstanding interest in the subject of philanthropy and its relationship with religion.

March 22

"Lord Siva's Song: Adventures in Translating the Isvara Gita" lecture by Andrew J. Nicholson, State University of New York Stonybrook, part of the 2024 Hindu Studies Lecture Series, Re-Examining the Scholar-Text Relationship

Learning in an interdisciplinary environment...

Delving into each author's research method to prepare for the weekly seminars, I gained a comprehensive understanding of the epistemological foundations of various disciplines.

—Tenzin Bhuchung
Visiting Fellow



...produces scholars who can speak beyond their specialties.

This workshop has motivated me to engage with fields of study and methodologies outside of my wheelhouse, providing me with more analytical tools and perspectives to incorporate in my own writing.

—Jeremy Stitts
Graduate Student Fellow



I especially enjoyed reading my peers' papers, as this pushed me to engage with material outside my "expertise" and focus on argument structure and clarity.

—Ipsita Dey
Graduate Student Fellow



I learned about archival strategies utilized by scholars of the ancient world to uncover the perspectives of marginalized groups, providing me new methods for my own work of representing Black children's historical experiences.

—Mélena Laudig
Graduate Student Fellow



The multi-disciplinary nature of the CCSR workshop has continually pushed me beyond the confines of my subfield, compelling me to articulate the meaning and significance of my research to a broader audience within the humanities.

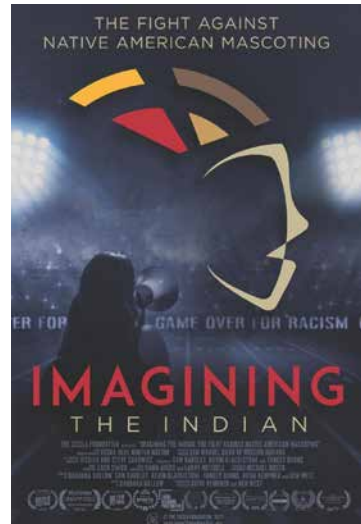
—Jae Pi
Graduate Student Fellow



The weekly workshop taught me how to present research to academics outside my area of speciality, training that will be invaluable as I prepare to give job talks. Serving as a discussant trained me to contribute usefully to another's research when it lies outside my subfield; I learned that I have much to offer.

—Emily Chesley
Graduate Student Fellow





March 27
Imagining the Indian

The public screening of the feature-length documentary *Imagining the Indian* (2022) was followed by a question-and-answer session with the director, Ben West, and the producer, Yancey Burns. The event attracted a total of 76 people, including undergraduate and graduate students, faculty from various units, and even some from university administration in addition to the wider community. The film and its director and producer were introduced by Garry Sparks (Religion Department), and Elizabeth Ellis (History Department) joined West and Burns in the Q&A session. Prior to the event West and Burns participated in REL 257/ AMS 397 “Religion and Film.” They presented on various aspects of documentary filmmaking in general (e.g., financing, project design, process, shot composition, equipment, ethics and legal concerns, etc.)—illustrated by shared scenes/shots from their current film project on Native American veterans – and approaches to working with Native American communities in

general. The film’s director and producer were also hosted by Gabriel Swift to view various items in Princeton University Library’s Special Collections related to their films’ topics: Items that Gabriel shared from Special Collections pertained to mission schools on Native American reservations, Native Americans and sports (e.g., early 20th-century, all-Native peoples minor league baseball teams), Native American veterans, and industrial exploitation and toxic waste on/of Native American lands.

April 3
“Islam and Antiracism” Religion and the Public Conversation with Jonathan Brown, Georgetown University, and Hasan Hameed, Princeton University

It is commonly claimed that Islam is antiracist, even inherently bent on enslaving Black Africans. Western and African critics alike have contended that antiracist racism is in the faith’s very scriptural foundations and its traditions of law, spirituality, and theology. In conversation with Graduate Fellow Hasan Hameed, Jonathan Brown offered a sweeping look at Islamic scripture, law, Sufism, and history to interrogate this claim. Locating its origins in conservative politics, modern Afrocentrism, and the old trope of Barbary enslavement, Brown discussed how antiracist racism arose in the Islamic world and became entangled with normative tradition.

April 5
“The Word and the Sword: Early Modern Spanish Pacific Studies and its Challenges, Opportunities and

Outlook” Conference
Organized by Christina Lee, Spanish and Portuguese

The Spanish Pacific conceptualizes the areas that the Spanish Crown conquered or aspired to conquer spiritually and territorially between the years 1521, the year of Magellan’s transpacific journey to Asia, and 1815, the year the last transpacific galleon that linked Latin America to Asia stopped operating. This is a space located in Southeast and East Asia, which included the Philippines and the Marianas, where Spain effectively established itself as a colonial power, but also parts of China, Japan, and the Moluccas that Spain mapped as part of the hemisphere assigned to it by the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas. The main purpose of the workshop was to expose scholars from all stages and from a diverse range of disciplines to concrete ways in which they can intervene and advance this field of research at the intersection of Religious Studies, Latin American studies, Early Modern Studies,



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Philippine Studies, and East Asian Studies. The event brought together fifteen scholars—emerging and more established—who have been shaping the field of early modern Spanish Pacific studies in Latin America, Asia, Europe, and the United States. With this objective in mind, rather than showcasing individual papers, the event focused on the discussion of the challenges, opportunities, and the outlook afforded in this interdisciplinary field. We had four roundtable panels, each composed of a Princeton student moderator/emerging scholar and three or four invited panelists. There was general agreement among the attendees that we could think of the Spanish Pacific in a more expansive way, conceptually speaking. In other words, we arrived at the notion that the Spanish Pacific is not just a geographically bounded space, but as a “web of connections” that emanated from the crucial contact zone of the Spanish Philippines to varied and distant locations in Asia and Spanish America. We recognized the Spanish Pacific as a “social space” constituted in and through a variety of spatial practices, driven theoretically by evangelization, but that also included navigation, commerce, labor, migration, colonization, translation, and evangelization, which generated connections of all kinds between Asia, the Americas, and Europe. Upon the suggestion of Professor Ricardo Padrón, University of Virginia, the participants agreed to form a society for the study of Early Modern Transpacific studies.

April 9
“Praisesong for the Kitchen Ghosts”
A book reading by Crystal Wilkinson,



the University of Kentucky, part of the Crossroads Project

Acclaimed author Crystal Wilkinson read from her recent memoir/cookbook *Praisesong for the Kitchen Ghosts*. In conversation with Crossroads Project director Judith Weisenfeld, Wilkinson reflected on the intertwining of food, religion and memory in Black Appalachia.

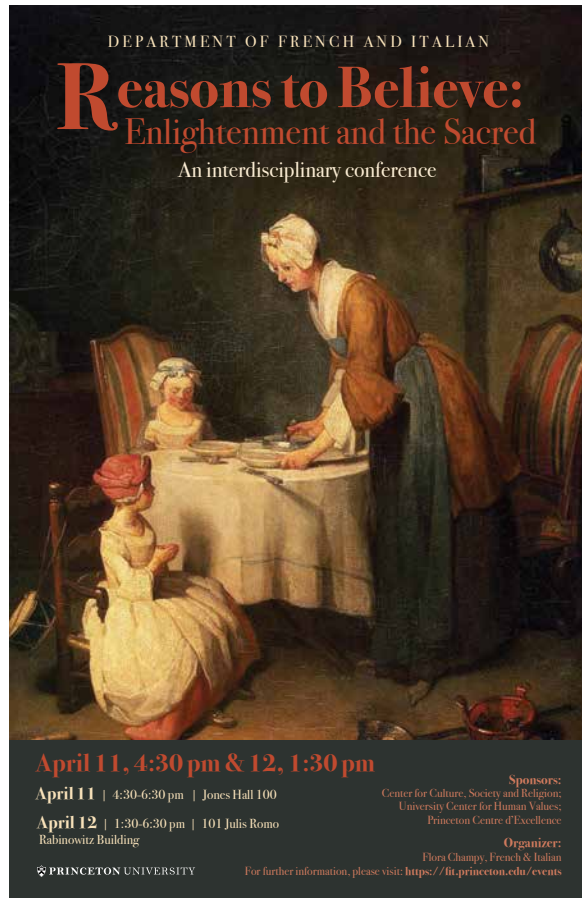
April 10
Workshop: “Ungrooming the Voice: An Interactive Workshop on Premodern Vocal Techniques”

Western art music requires “groomed” voices—voices that have been trained through private lessons, choral ensembles, or conservatory masterclasses. But are premodern repertoires well served by approaches to and attitudes about the voice that emerged no more than 200 years ago? Join the ensemble Cut Circle for an interactive workshop, geared toward all backgrounds and experience levels—including and especially no musical experience at all—in which participants are invited to

decenter received esthetic values by ungrooming their voices.

April 11-12
“Reasons to Believe: Enlightenment and the Sacred”

Organized by Flora Champy of the French and Italian Department, the conference was a great success—one of the attendants described it as “scintillating”. It gathered six distinguished scholars from various institutions at both national and international level (one speaker came from Sorbonne Université in Paris, France). The event started with a roundtable featuring three contributors to the recent collective volume *Let There Be Enlightenment* (ed. Anton Matytsin & Dan Edelstein, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018). Anton Matytsin, University of Florida, recalled the beginning of the project, which started as a conference at Stanford University in 2014, while Charly Coleman, Columbia University, and Darrin McMahon, Dartmouth, summarized their contributions to the volume, dealing respectively with representations of the dream state



in Enlightenment writings and the evolution of public lighting in the eighteenth century. The next day two panels explored the debates sparked within the French Enlightenment by new readings of religious materials, as well as the presence of religious background in modern secular values. The interdisciplinary nature of the conference proved highly valuable, allowing for instance literary scholars to know about the religious sources Voltaire drew on to describe the consequences of the 1756 Lisbon earthquake in *Candide*. The event allowed for a fruitful dialogue between intellectual historians and literary scholars, gaining new insights and a deeper understanding of the complex relation between religious values and secular modernity. The event also involved

undergraduate students in a public reading.

April 12

Concert: “Ungroomed Renaissance: Josquin’s Missa L’ami Baudichon; Songs and Motets”

What are we supposed to make of a Renaissance mass whose audible engine is a lewd song? Cut Circle explores this question through the astonishingly ungroomed *Missa L’ami Baudichon*. The mass anchors a wide-ranging program of sacred and secular music by Josquin des Prez (1450–1521).

Presented by LUDUS, a Collaborative Humanities Project.

April 12-13

Ecstatic Devotions: A Conversation on Indian Ocean World Ritual and Performance

Conference organized by Michael Laffan and Harini Kumar. When confronted with the sight of devotees throwing themselves under the wheels of the so-called Juggernaut, or others seemingly stabbing themselves to the beat of tambourines, or even flagellating

their skin in winding processions, the outsider to Afro-Asian shores was often at a loss to understand the pious motivations of the participants or even, as time went on, the deliberate challenge to imperial authority that such acts might embody. Over time, too, several of the forms of ecstatic devotion that this workshop intends to interrogate--from the moment of encounter to their transplantation in spaces beyond the Indian Ocean World--have often been domesticated as symbols of national culture. Such has been the trajectory, at first glance, of the Sufi-inspired ratib of Cape Town which, with its tambourines and piercings, is now inscribed as quintessentially “Malay” in South Africa. Another is the similarly piercing Hindu festival of Thaipusam, dedicated to the deity Kartikeya (a.k.a. Skanda or Murugan). Traditionally celebrated by the Tamil people, it is now seen by some as taking its most spectacular form in the erstwhile British Straits Settlements of Penang and Singapore. Bringing historians and anthropologists together in the spaces where Bob Darnton and



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Left to right: Alec Soucy, Max Strassfeld

Below right: Franciscus Verellen

Clifford Geertz once taught, this workshop encouraged scholars to open up questions for the comparative study of ritual and belonging across a range of practices and spaces, from hook swinging and firewalking in India to the processions, commemorations, and indeed celebrations of the ecstatic around the not-so-everyday world today.

April 15

“Thích Nhất Hạnh and the Peace Movement: The Making of a Buddhist Superstar” Buddhist Studies Workshop with Alec Soucy, Saint Mary’s University

April 16

“Trans Talmud: Religion and the Public Conversation with Max Strassfeld, University of Arizona, and Eliav Grossman, Princeton University

Max Strassfeld’s research places eunuchs and androgynes at the center of rabbinic literature and asks what we can learn from them



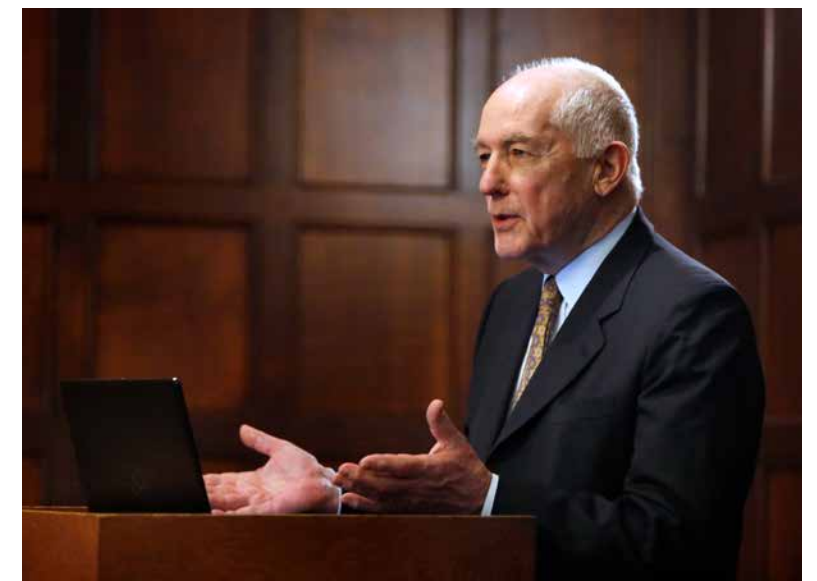
of masculinity, Strassfeld emphasizes the unique potential of these figures to not only establish the boundary of law but exceed and transform it. In this conversation with CCSR Graduate Research Fellow Eliav Grossman, Strassfeld challenged how we understand gender in Judaism and demonstrated that acknowledging nonbinary gender prompts a reassessment of Jewish literature and law.

April 18

Commentators at Play: The Bhagavata Purana’s Exegetical Tradition” lecture by Ravi Gupta, Utah State University, part of the 2024 Hindu Studies Lecture Series, Re-Examining the Scholar-Text Relationship

May 6

“Transcending Turmoil: The Tang–Five Dynasties Transition in the Daoist Testimony of Du Guangtin (850–933)” lecture by Franciscus Verellen, Ecole française d’Extrême-Orient



Yin-Cheng Distinguished Lecture in Buddhism

Buddhist Practice Theory and Animal Ethics

Janet Gyatso, Harvard Divinity School with response by Brook Ziporyn, University of Chicago

How might we use old and venerable ideas in Buddhist soteriology to address our complicity in animal suffering today?

And how might interactions with animals help us better understand Buddhist meditation theory? How might meditative remembrances of our past lives as animal embodiments help us to inhabit our interactions with non-human animals more thoughtfully? The Buddhist Tzu Chi Charity Foundation supported this Yin-Cheng Distinguished Lecture in Buddhism by Professor Janet Gyatso with a response by Professor



BUDDHIST PRACTICE THEORY & ANIMAL ETHICS
 Janet Gyatso
 Harvard Divinity School
 with response by Brook Ziporyn, University of Chicago
 February 15, 2024, 4:30 pm EST
 Princeton University Friend Center 008
 and online
 via livestream

Brook Ziporyn. Approximately 50 participants attended in person, with an additional 77 watching online. After a welcome by Professor Jonathan Gold and a message of support by Tzu Chi Foundation's Deputy CEO Dr. ReySheng Her, conveyed by graduate student Kelly Carlton, Professor Gyatso delivered her lecture.

Gyatso appealed to us, firstly, to dwell on the pleasurable wisdom that we get from observing animals, caring for them, and participating in their lives. Seeking to parse out the phenomenological grounds for Buddhist ideas of compassion, she drew our gaze to the synchronicity of animal practices, their intimacy, their interdependence, and the grace with which they blend into one another and the environment. Interdependence, she proposed, makes for a moral imperative that goes beyond responsibility and demands mutual obligation. Gyatso shared her second set of insights on the ways by which "seeing," or sudden realization, leads to "practice," or focused and repeated attention in the service of habituation. While insights break ground, repetitive meditation allows us to "renew our realization over and over again," which enables the insights to "extend into space" as we apply them to other situations. Thirdly, returning to the phenomenology of animals, Gyatso encourages us to meditate on how Buddhist concepts

of "swift insight" and "gradual habituation" resonate with natural laws. Animals navigate and explore the world leisurely but jump into action in a split second when needed. As such, we are led to think about how careful attention to animal behavior might allow us to better understand Buddhist meditation ideas and practices in ways that do not assume the superiority of human philosophies over animal ways of being. This led to the fourth part of Gyatso's agenda, on the meditative practices we might undertake alongside animals. She encouraged us to spend time with domesticated animals, wild animals and insects, following their lead so that we can know them on their terms. She urged us to adopt attentiveness to animal suffering, learn to stay with these painful thoughts, and channel them through compassion. These meditative practices, inspired by traditional Tibetan Buddhist meditation techniques, she argued, "cultivate our capacity not just to understand intellectually the suffering of animals, but to see them in such powerful ways that we end up deciding and promising to change our behavior."

Professor Brook Ziporyn responded with his thoughts on temporality, memory, and our perception of and visualization of others. Leveraging the story of the Buddha's enlightenment as told in the Mahācattārisaka Sutta, Ziporyn reminded us that

CENTER EVENTS



the Buddha's enlightenment did not proceed abruptly but rather consisted of three breakthroughs over the course of the night. In the first watch of the night, the Buddha remembered his many past lives and re-experienced the specificities of these pasts. Buddhist Jātaka literature suggests that the Buddha inhabited animal bodies. We learn from Buddha's first awakening that we ought to remember our animal past lives and the pleasure and pains of those lives. In the second watch the Buddha's vision moved outward, as he perceived the rising and falling of all other sentient beings. Only by dwelling on the first two phases, can one "blossom" outwards and learn compassion and other Buddhist truths gleaned

in the third phase of the night. Ziporyn compared the Buddha's method of memory and step-wise enlightenment to Gyatso's discussion on sensitization to the plight of animals, meditation through the co-presence of animals, and visualization. He drew our focus back to the importance of time, on how the fast and slow modes of animal life provide us lessons on meditatively experiencing the world in viscerally meaningful ways. A "limitless detailed personal memory of multiple identities," he proposed, reminds us to inhabit our encounters with animals "as if we were experiencing a memory of our own past." In that condition we could work towards empathizing with the suffering of animals that

we were and that we live alongside. The question-and-answer session carried these thoughts to other concerns such as the difference our individual actions can have on the massive global agroindustrial system; the ethics surrounding the consumption of meat from animals killed accidentally or killed on our behalf; what bearing animal acts of predation have on our ethical practices; the relationship among suffering, the inability to look away, and our persistent engagements in ethical action; and the connection between sentience and the limits of empathy and compassion. The lecture and discussion provoked deep reflection among audience members on animal suffering.

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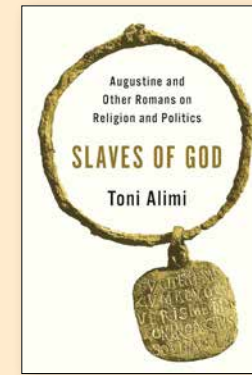
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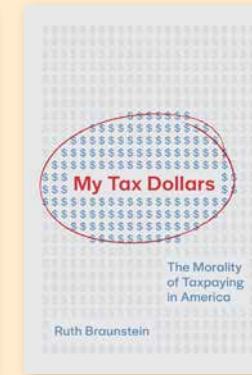
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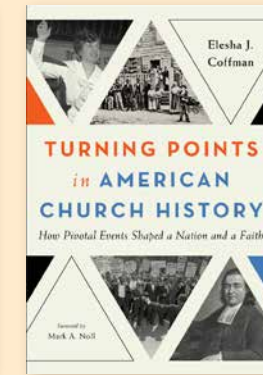
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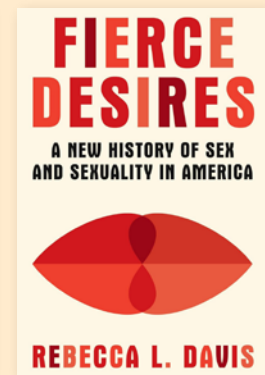
Ruth Braunstein



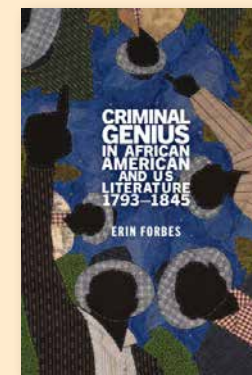
Rosemary Carbine



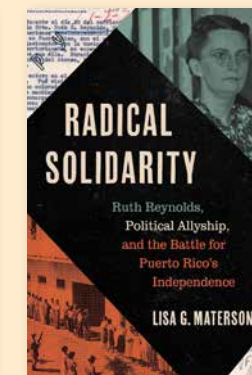
Elesha Coffman



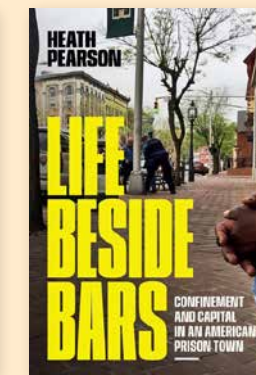
Rebecca Davis



Erin Forbes



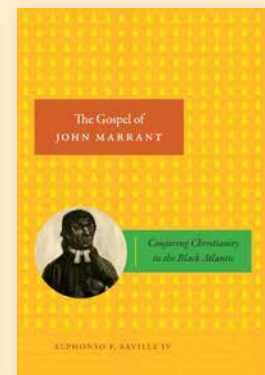
Lisa G. Materson



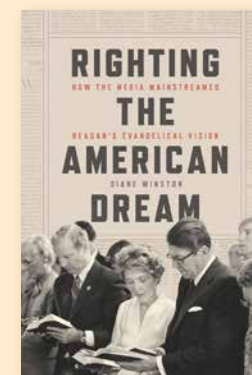
Heath Pearson



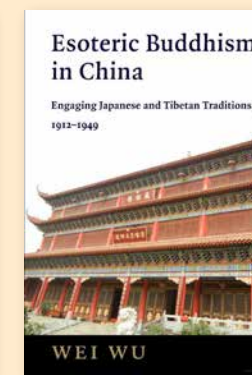
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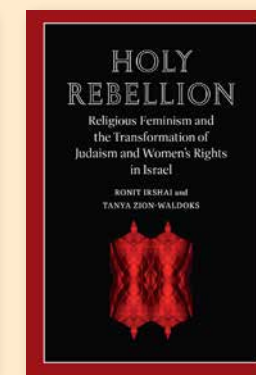
Alphonso Saville, IV



Diane Winston



Wei Wu



Ronit Irshai and Tanya Zion-Waldoks

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Next Year

Visiting Fellows

Tenzin Bhuchung
Rachel Carbonara
Lauren K. McCormick
Suzanne C. van Geuns

Graduate Student Fellows

Culture, Society and Religion Fellows

Kim Akano, Religion, “Welcome Intruders”: Religion, Empire, and African Student Migration to the United States”

Ahmed AlMaazmi, Near Eastern Studies, “An Enchanted Sea: The Occult Sciences in the Early Modern Indian Ocean World”

Rachel Brown-Weinstock, Sociology and Social Policy, “Navigating the Narrative Rupture: How a Bible Belt Community Negotiated America’s ‘Racial Reckoning’”

Aysenur Cam, Religion, “Reading Revelation: Rethinking a Muslim Ethics of Environment”

Kelly Carlton, Religion, “Children in Medieval Chinese Buddhism: Discourses on Ethics and Practice”

Matthieu Dutil, French and Italian, “Shamanism and Animism in Contemporary French Literature: Re-voicing the Non-human Animal”

Yangyou Fang, Spanish and Portuguese, “China and the Chinese in the Making of the Spanish Pacific (1521-1815)”

Silvia Gianolio, Art and Archaeology, “Reno-Mosan treasure bindings 1150-1200 and their histories: the lives and afterlives of a type”

Rebekah Haigh, Religion, “Scripting Identity: (En)Gendering Violence in the War Scroll and the Book of Revelation”

Hasan Hameed, History, “Ethics and Erotics: The reception of Persian literature and the remaking of Islam in colonial India”

Navjit Kaur, Anthropology, “The Rope of Allah: Ethical Striving between Financial and National Futures in Malerkotla, Indian Punjab”

Omri Matarasso, History, “Shattered Mountains of Revelation: The Confessionalization of Northern Mesopotamia”

Sarah Norvell, Classics, “The Persistent Past: Memory, Material Culture, and Social Practice in Crete and Lakonia, c. 1100-480 BCE”

William Pedrick, Art and Archaeology, “Hanging Objects: Time, Space, and the Background in Greek Art and Archaeology”

Jae Pi, Religion, “The Possibilities and Limitations of Hermeneutics: Vasubandhu’s

Buddhist Hermeneutics from the Vyākhyāyukti”

Earnestine Qiu, Art and Archaeology, “Place and Power in the Anatolian Alexander Romances”

Aliya Ram, Comparative Literature and Interdisciplinary Humanities, “Aesthetic innovation, subject formation and communal bonds in 20th-century decolonization”

Shivani Shedde, Architecture, “Negotiating A Third Way: Architectural Imaginaries Beyond Colony and Nation State 1947-1977”

Anastasia Shmytova, Music, “From Penie to Musikiya: Musical, Liturgical, and Aesthetic Change in Seventeenth-century Russia”

Mélèna Laudig, Religion, “Her Country’s Children’: African American Religion and Childhood in Slavery and Freedom”

Chapman Sklar, Religion, “Healing a Nation: Facets of Modern Muslim Medicine in Colonial South Asia”

Jeremy Stitts, History, “How the West was Won: Emperors, Bishops, and the Creation of Christian Capitals”

Constantine Theodoridis, History, “The Sultan’s Promise: European-Ottoman Rituals of ‘League and Friendship’ (1590-1780)”

Victoria von der Leyen, Religion, “Grappling with Finitude: On the Potential and Danger of World-Withdrawal”

Echo Weng, Religion, “Bodily Transformation in Medieval Chinese Buddhism, 4th-12th centuries”

Madison Wolfert, English, “Marriage, Race, and Labor in the Early Modern Atlantic World”

Liya Xie, History, “In the Shadows of Rationality: Epistemic Fringes and Multiple ‘Easts’ in the making of Russian Modernity (1880-1930)”

Media Team Fellows

Peter Benson, English, “Novel Specters, Novel Selves: Speculative Fiction in the Long Eighteenth Century”

Lucia Filipova, Spanish and Portuguese, “Spanish Child Prodiges and the Creation of National Myths: The Construction of ‘Spanishness’ Through Popular Culture During the Spanish Miracle (1955-1975)”

Stephanie Luescher, Near Eastern Studies, “Taking Note: Writing Social History through Manuscript Annotations”

Camilla Pletuhina-Tonev, “Battle for the Souls: Contested Orthodox Christianity and Imperial Subjecthood in Early Modern Eurasia”

Mathilde Sauquet, Art and Archaeology, “Ecosystems of Pleasure and Power in the Mediterranean: Medieval Courts and their Natural Environments”

Jordan K. Skinner, English, “Medieval Curfew: Poetic Space and the Governance of Time”

Xinyi Wei, Near Eastern Studies, “Making of the Sexual Subject: Marriage, Slavery, and Consent under the Mongol Empire”

Course

Sponsored Undergraduate Course
 Fall 2024 HIS 496 “The Science of Heaven and Hell” taught by Anthony Grafton and Jennifer Rampling, History

Events

August 13, 2024
 Contemplative Pedagogy for Black Buddhist Studies Workshop

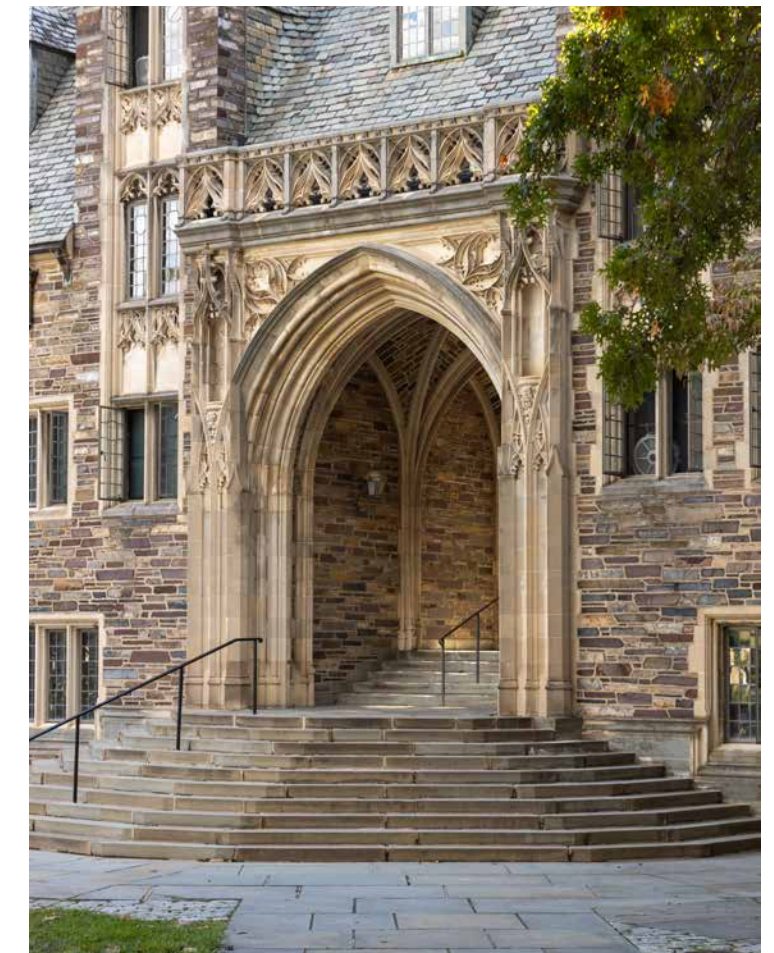
December 3, 2024
 “Devotional Creatures: Bugs in Chinese Religions” Lecture by Daniel Burton-Rose and Stuart Young

January 16-17, 2025
 Yin-Cheng Distinguished Buddhism Conference: Agency and experience - Buddhist and cognitive perspectives, with keynote lecture by John Dunne

February 13, 2025
 Buddhist Studies Workshop

March 1-2, 2025
 Tangible Knowledge: Japan’s Shōsōin and the Making of Manuscripts, Treasures, and Archives, Conference organized by Bryan Lowe and Akiko Walley

Spring 2025
 Doll Lecture on Religion and Money, Julia Elyachar





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