Summaries of Doctoral Dissertations

Danielle Widmann Abraham [Ph.D.]

Beyond Charity: Poverty, Gender, and Local Islam in Contemporary India

This study of contemporary Muslim poverty alleviation projects in India investigates the way in which Islamic social ethics are brought to bear on efforts to redress social suffering. Drawing on ethnographic field research in Hyderabad, one of many cities that experienced Hindu-Muslim riots after the destruction of the Babri Masjid, the present study chronicles how confronting social suffering in the wake of episodic violence propels the creation of new public spaces and experimental social practices. Within such spaces, local understandings of Islamic ethics, gender formation, inter-religious relations, and religious authority are elaborated in such a way as to reshape lived social relations. This study demonstrates that Muslims counter social suffering by drawing on the longstanding commitment to charity and care of the vulnerable that is the hallmark of Islamic social ethics, while simultaneously reformulating this tradition in light of contemporary concerns about communal violence and gender justice. Focusing on diverse Muslim poverty alleviation projects within the same urban area, this study further shows that there is no monolithic Islamic response to poverty. Rather than a single ethical code that organizes Muslim poverty alleviation efforts, practical interventions are shown to be the result of particular interpretations of Islamic tradition, suffering, and gender that cluster together to support emergent notions of well-being.

Finally, these emergent social projects illustrate how efforts to redress poverty localize Islam. The effort to alleviate poverty instantiates a creative field in which ways of being Muslim are contested, embodied, and engaged through the frame of local tradition. In such local spaces, Islam is elaborated in such a way as to render moral those social practices that counter the use of force. Within the ongoing efforts of poverty alleviation, religion is thus inflected to express a desire that what bonds people together in everyday life should be something other than violence, subordination, fragmentation, deprivation, and suffering. As Muslim poverty alleviation projects affirm distinct modes of belonging to others, and work to inhibit

https://doi.org/10.1017/S001781601400039X Published online by Cambridge University Press

the formation of zones of social sacrifice, they simultaneously construct nonviolent social practices and gender reforms as expressions of local Islam.

Adviser: Parimal G. Patil

Paul Kang-Kul Cho [Ph.D.]

The Sea in the Hebrew Bible: Myth, Metaphor, and Muthos

The dissertation recounts the variegated journey of the sea in the Hebrew Bible through the lens of myth, metaphor, and *muthos*. The journey begins outside the Bible in ancient Near Eastern sea myths exemplified by the Ugaritic *Baal Cycle* and the Mesopotamian *Enuma Elish*, which tell the story of a sea deity whose defeat by a protagonist god in cosmic battle precedes three goodly consequences: creation, kingship, and temple. The study continues with the analysis of the biblical presentation of creation, kingship, and temple with emphasis on the constellation of themes and characters of the sea myth. The dissertation next analyzes the use of the sea myth as a metaphor for three events on the plane of history: the exodus (Exodus 14–15), the Babylonian exile (Isaiah 40–55), and the eschaton (Isaiah 24–27 and Daniel 7). Finally, the discussion moves from the analysis of the ways in which the sea *muthos* functions as a metaphor for the biblical presentation of individual events to the examination of the role the sea *muthos* plays as a metaphor for a biblical view of historical reality *in toto*. In sum, the dissertation extends the study of sea imagery in the Hebrew Bible from mythology to metaphorology and narratology to argue for the deep, enduring, and transformative place of the sea myth within biblical tradition.

Adviser: Jon D. Levenson

James Duncan Gentry [Ph.D.]

Substance and Sense: Objects of Power in the Life, Writings, and Legacy of the Tibetan Ritual Master Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan

This thesis is a reflection on objects of power and their roles in people's lives through the lens of a single case example: power objects as they appear throughout the narrative, philosophical, and ritual writings of the Tibetan Buddhist ritual specialist Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1552–1624) and his milieu. This study explores his discourse on power objects specifically for what it reveals about how human interactions with certain kinds of objects encourage the flow of power and charisma between them, and what the implications of these person-object transitions were for issues of identity, agency, and authority on the personal, institutional, and state registers in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Tibet.

My investigation of Sog bzlog pa's discourse on power objects shows how the genres of narrative, philosophy, and liturgy relate such objects, each presenting them from a slightly different perspective. I illustrate how narratives depict power objects as central to the identity of Sog bzlog pa and his circle, mediating relations

https://doi.org/10.1017/S001781601400039X Published online by Cambridge University Press

that are in turn social, political, religious, aesthetic, and economic in tone, and contributing to the authority of the persons involved. This flow of power between persons and objects, I demonstrate further, is connected to tensions over the sources of transformational power as rooted either in objects, or in the people instrumental in their ritual treatment or use. I show how this tension between objective and subjective power plays out in Sog bzlog pa's philosophical speculations about power objects and in his rituals featuring them. I also trace the persistence of this discourse after Sog bzlog pa's death in the seventeenth-century state-building activities of Tibet and Sikkim, and in the present day identity of Sikkim's Buddhist population. Power objects emerge as hybrid subject-object mediators, which variously embody, channel, and direct the flow of power and authority between persons, objects, communities, institutions, and the state, as they flow across boundaries and bind these in their tracks. Finally, I illustrate how this discourse of power objects both complicates and extends contemporary theoretical reflections on the relationships between objects, actions, persons, and meanings.

Adviser: Janet Gyatso

Elon Goldstein [Ph.D.]

Ethics and Religion in a Classic of Sanskrit Drama: Harṣa's Nāgānanda

This dissertation explores a set of intersecting ethical, religious, and aesthetic concerns in a major South Asian Sanskrit drama from the seventh century C.E., Harṣa's *Nāgānanda* (*Joy of the Serpent-People*). *Nāgānanda* features as its protagonist a bodhisattva, a Buddhist type of ideal person, but the text's attitude toward the bodhisattva is ambivalent and complex. For more than a millennium following the text's composition, South Asian literati debated the ethical and aesthetic questions that *Nāgānanda* raises. To elucidate those historical concerns and to uncover dimensions of meaning in the text beyond those emphasized by pre-modern South Asian thinkers, I take into account Sanskrit literary criticism as well as contemporary hermeneutical approaches. I pay particular attention to an extensive, hitherto untranslated Sanskrit commentary on the play from roughly the fourteenth century. This study also considers an array of earlier Sanskrit texts that directly discuss *Nāgānanda* or pertain to it.

Nāgānanda envisions a reader who already possesses certain understandings about its genre and the literary culture that produced it. So the dissertation first supplies that requisite background. Next, the dissertation examines an earlier drama about another bodhisattva that is crucial for a deep understanding of *Nāgānanda*: Candragomin's fifth-century C.E. *Lokānanda* (*Joy of the World*). Having observed how *Nāgānanda* uses the earlier play as a foil, I then present a comprehensive interpretation of *Nāgānanda*. To explicate both dramas, I investigate how the texts' sophisticated literary features convey various meanings and exert their intended, transformative effects upon their envisioned readers.

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The ethical facets of Sanskrit drama have been little studied and little theorized in prior scholarship on South Asian religions. Overall, both *Nāgānanda* and the theoretical texts that analyze it grapple with ethical concerns in ways that are distinctive to intellectual traditions linked to Sanskrit high literature (*kāvya*). Alongside the historical aims of this project, by bridging viewpoints from Sanskrit literary culture and contemporary thought, I seek to render *Nāgānanda* more accessible so that modern readers may better appreciate the relevance that this classic text can hold for us today.

Adviser: Parimal G. Patil

Brett Malcolm Grainger [Ph.D.]

The Vital Landscape: Evangelical Religious Practice and the Culture of Nature in America, 1790–1870

Evangelicalism, historians have long noted, is a movement born in field, forest, and stream. Like most truisms, however, this one has rarely been explored as deeply as it deserves. Using the tools of cultural history, this dissertation explores the variety of ways in which antebellum evangelicals engaged, enlisted, and resisted the spiritual potential of the natural world in order to progress in the religious life. By examining practices as diverse as camp meetings, outdoor baptism, contemplation of the book of nature, water-cure, electrotherapy, and mesmerism, my dissertation retrieves and interprets some of the broader contours and tensions within these traditions of evangelical "nature piety." One goal of this project, therefore, is to open up the natural world to scholars as an important site and source for evangelical religious experience in the antebellum period. Another is to contextualize these attitudes. Previous scholarship has assumed evangelical disinterest in nature or else read rising interest in the natural world as inherently corrosive to orthodoxy. However, while evangelical interest in the spiritual potential of nature paralleled that of Romantics and Transcendentalists, it had different origins and aims. Situating forms of evangelical nature piety within late medieval and early modern debates concerning primitivism, the spiritual senses, and mysticism—including notions of divine ascent and union with Christ—the project demonstrates how "vital piety," the end of all evangelical effort, fed and flowed from a special sense of nature as enlivened by the presence of Christ. Proceeding thematically and chronologically, it tracks practices associated with progressive stages in the spiritual life, moving from the new birth (conversion) to the new life (sanctification), culminating in speculative investigations into the nature of the new earth (eschatology). Such a structure underscores the limitations of secularization narratives, which have long presented the nineteenth-century turn to nature as a Trojan horse of heresy. The dissertation reveals a more complicated story. While antebellum evangelicals rhetorically distanced themselves from "superstitious" and "idolatrous" forms of

https://doi.org/10.1017/S001781601400039X Published online by Cambridge University Press

nature worship, in daily life they actively engaged a vitalist view of nature as part of larger efforts to reform and renew orthodox patterns of belief and behavior.

Adviser: David Neil Hempton

Charlotte Harrison [Ph.D.]

The Ethics of Physician Collaboration in Conditions of Uncertainty: Shared Responsibility, Justifiable Deference, and the Example of Organ Donation and Transplantation

Dissertation abstract embargoed for two years.

Adviser: J. Bryan Hehir

Maria Cecilia Aguilar Holt [Th.D.]

From the River: Jesuit Missions and Exemplarity in Spanish Colonial Philippines, 1581–1768

Using an interdisciplinary approach to textual interpretation and drawing from the fields of theology, history, literature, cultural studies, and anthropology, this dissertation explores the idea that Jesuit missionaries in the Philippines performed acts of *imitatio Christi* that were every bit as complex and creative as those demanded of the new Christian converts to whom they ministered. While the dissertation does not engage in an uncritical defense of missionaries, it does attempt to restore some of the complexity of the missionaries' own negotiations with the ideals of Roman Catholic conversion, exemplarity, and imitation.

References to patristic authors and Roman historians, and emulation of their rhetorical style and method by Jesuit missionaries may be seen as evidence of imitation at work, but do not signal its transparent application. Rather, they indicate theological reflection and critique in light of particular circumstances. Ideas about martyrdom, miracle-working, the extirpation of idolatry, and the Church's relationship to empire itself were challenged by religious tensions in Europe and the New World, as well as locally. Indeed it is as a result of these circumstances that the liminality of Roman Catholic missionaries stands out because the liminalilty reveals the complexity of their own imitative relation—their own "colonized" situation, as it were—to Christian tradition. Away from home and far from the centers of European and colonial power, acts of imitation by individual missionaries in colonial Philippines alternately consolidated or ruptured these connections.

Adviser: Francis X. Clooney, S.J.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S001781601400039X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Jonathan Kline [Ph.D.]

Transforming the Tradition: Soundplay as an Interpretive Device in Innerbiblical Allusions

This study concerns the use in the Hebrew Bible of paronomasia (soundplay) for the purpose of alluding to and interpreting antecedent literary traditions also found in the Bible. The focus of the investigation lies on the biblical writers' use of allusive paronomasia for the purpose of constructing theological discourse, that is, in service of their efforts to describe the nature of God and his relationship to humanity. By showing that a variety of biblical texts contain examples of allusive paronomasia employed for this purpose, the study demonstrates that this literary device played an important role in the growth of the biblical text as a whole and in the development of ancient Israelite and early Jewish theological traditions.

The examples discussed in this study reveal that allusive paronomasia is not limited to a particular biblical book, portion thereof, or generic corpus. Furthermore, allusive paronomasia, although not restricted to late texts, seems to be preponderant in them. This suggests that over time the scribes of ancient Israel increasingly viewed even the smallest details of the tradition (such as individual phonemes in earlier texts) to be highly significant for interpretation. Inasmuch as this attitude characterizes early interpretation of the Bible—especially the pesher literature of Qumran and rabbinic midrash—the use of paronomasia as a productive principle of exegesis in innerbiblical interpretation raises the question to what extent these later literatures' use of wordplay to interpret the biblical text constitutes an organic outgrowth of the compositional practices that shaped the biblical text itself.

On the broadest level, the present work draws attention to how language was conceived of in ancient Israel and suggests that at least some of the biblical writers viewed words not as merely human phenomena but as expressive of the character of God and the destiny of humanity. By illustrating some of the ways the biblical writers considered sounds—the smallest units of linguistic expression—to reveal the significance of the past, present, and future, this study suggests that the concept of divinely inspired writing was present in ancient Israel well before the close of the canon.

Adviser: D. Andrew Teeter

Suheil Ismail Laher [Ph.D.]

Twisted Threads: Genesis, Development, and Application of the Term and Concept of Tawātur *in Islamic Thought*

Tawātur is the concept that if we obtain the same information through a sufficient number of independent channels, we reach certainty about that data. When applied to the transmission of Qur'ān and hadith texts, *tawātur* can serve as a means by which to assert the truth of a source-text, which in turn has implications for cor-

https://doi.org/10.1017/S001781601400039X Published online by Cambridge University Press

rectness of the religious belief or practice that is conveyed by the text, and hence the orthodoxy of the one accepting or rejecting it.

This dissertation is an attempt to unravel the twisted historical threads of the conception and usage of *tawātur* across diverse disciplines, with a view to discovering the extent to which *tawātur* was used by Muslim scholars to define the boundaries of Islam and of orthodoxy. I undertake a diachronic study of primary sources in theology, Qur'ānic studies, legal theory, and *ḥadīth* studies, with an emphasis on the first five centuries of Islamic history, which represent the formative period for much of Islamic thought. I explore the origins of the term and concept in *kalām* circles, its eventual adoption by anti-*kalām ḥadīth*-folk, its transition into legal theory and thence *ḥadīth* studies, and its application to evaluating transmission of the Qur'ānic text and its recitation and to *ḥadīth*s.

I find that *tawātur* of the Qur'ān (in the broad outlines of the 'Uthmānic text), along with some core beliefs and central rituals, found overwhelming acknowledgement among Muslims as a sine qua non of Islam. However, *tawātur* was not successful in delineating a unanimous canon of *ḥadīth*s, because the *mutāwatir* status of particular *ḥadīth*s is sometimes disputed, and because of ambiguous interpretations of certain texts. Nevertheless, the dominant and majority voices in Muslim scholarship (both Sunnī and Shī'ite) reached a steady state of a two-tiered orthodoxy (corresponding to the two-tiered *tawātur*) that is linked to a concept that knowledge is not unsusceptible to progression over time.

Adviser: M. Shahab Ahmed

Deonnie Moodie [Ph.D.]

Contesting Kālīghāṭ: Discursive Productions of a Hindu Temple in Colonial and Contemporary Kolkata

This dissertation is an analysis of discursive productions of Kālīghāṭ, a Hindu temple dedicated to the goddess Kālī in Kolkata (formerly Calcutta), India. It is the most famous temple in what was once the capital of the British Empire in India and what is now India's third largest city. Kālīghāṭ has a reputation for being ancient, powerful, corrupt, and dirty. This dissertation aims to discover how and why these are the adjectives most often used to describe this temple. While there are many stories that can be told about a place and many words that can be used to characterize it, these four dominate the public discourse on Kālīghāṭ. I demonstrate that these ideas about Kālīghāṭ are not discoveries made about the site, but instead are creations of it that have been produced at certain times, according to certain discursive practices, and toward certain ends.

Employing Michel Foucault's concept of the "discursive object," I analyze the ways in which verbal and written statements pertaining to the temple—ostensibly about a physical object with a material reality—in fact produce various discursive objects. When people think, talk, and write about Kālīghāṭ, they produce various "Kālīghāṭs." I focus particularly on statements made by middle-class Bengali Hindus

https://doi.org/10.1017/S001781601400039X Published online by Cambridge University Press

in books, newspaper articles, lawsuits, campaigns, and in personal conversation with me. From the colonial period to the present, in the vernacular Bengali language and in English, ideas about what this temple is have been produced in tandem with ideas about the nature of the city and its colonial legacy, what constitutes good Hinduism, the role of law in religious institutions, and middle-class notions of what a Hindu temple in a modern city ought to look and feel like. These ideas build upon one another so that Kālīghāṭ emerges, through two centuries of discourse, as a powerful symbol of Hindu heritage and dominance in this former colonial capital city and as a site that middle-class citizens, as well as government bodies, desire to influence and control.

Adviser: Anne Monius

Michelle Chaplin Sanchez [Ph.D.]

Providence: From Pronoia *to Immanent Affirmation in John Calvin's Institutes of 1559*

Over the twentieth century and into the present, theorists of secularization and political theology have explored ways that theological arguments shape the social, ethical, economic, and political imaginaries of the modern West. In many of these studies—by authors including Weber, Nietzsche, Schmitt, Lefort, Kantorowicz, Gauchet, and Agamben—the doctrine of providence has come under scrutiny alongside related theological debates over the nature of divine sovereignty, glory, the will, and the significance of immanent life in relation to divine transcendence. While it is often taken for granted that the Calvinist branch of Protestant reform likewise had a decisive impact on the shape of the modern West, there has been no extended treatment of Calvin's writing on providence, or related doctrines, that engages these arguments about secularization.

I argue that Calvin's *Institutes* of 1559 presents an excellent example of an intellectual project operating self-consciously at the intersection of the Christian theological tradition and the project of church and political reform, while also pedagogically addressing the reader on an individual level. This argument constitutes a double intervention. On the one hand, I make a critical contribution to philosophical and historical conversations on secularization by offering a reading of Calvin's *Institutes* that is critically responsive to these conversations. On the other hand, I provide a reading of Calvin's doctrine of providence that challenges the common notion that it suggests a deterministic view of divine transcendence. I argue instead that Calvin's doctrine of providence anchors his larger project of reform by reframing the locus of divine power outside the institutional bounds of the church and in an affirmative relation to the world more generally.

My argument includes an exploration of how Calvin's theology displays an interest in ways that texts, writing, and signification work to shape and organize the human ability to represent and navigate the world. I demonstrate this by relating Calvin's argument about providence to his theory of sacramental signification. I also

https://doi.org/10.1017/S001781601400039X Published online by Cambridge University Press

explore the relationship between texts and embodied practices across Calvin's 1559 *Institutes*. Finally, I relate the political implications of this sixteenth-century theological text to various claims made in literature on secularization and post-Schmittian political theology, arguing that Calvin's articulation of providence founds a notion of citizenship that secures human life beyond the bounds of governmental structures.

Adviser: Amy Hollywood

https://doi.org/10.1017/S001781601400039X Published online by Cambridge University Press