UE The Making of a World Religion
Introduction to the History of Sikhs and Sikhism

*Time: Thursday 15:15-16:45 (20.02.; 06.03.; 20.03.; 03.04.; 17.04.; 15.05.)*

*Place: IFW D 42*

*Instructor of Records: Prof. Dr. Harald Fischer-Tiné*
ABSTRACT

The primary aim of this course is to enhance the cultural sensitivity of the participants by introducing them to the richly diverse cultural and religious landscape of the Indian sub-continent while at the same time pointing to similarities and commonalities with more familiar western settings. Steering clear of exoticism or rigid cultural relativism, the course is designed to make students reflect on the interrelations between religion and politics and the processes of homogenisation and exclusion that go in tandem with religious community building. It provides a history of the Sikh religion that emerged as a distinct religious tradition between the early 16th and late 19th century in the north Indian Punjab and is now widely accepted as a “world religion”. This exemplary case study is used to illustrate a broader phenomenon, namely the kind of transformations religious communities undergo when faced with the challenges of modernity. The first part of the course offers a glimpse of the theology and liturgy of Sikhism, and explains why this particular Indian faith that was long perceived as part of Hinduism. The following sessions put the historical development of a religiously distinct Sikh community under scrutiny — from the days of founder Guru Nanak in the 15th to the multifaceted effects of the global migration of Sikhs in the 20th century and the rise of Sikh separatist terrorism in the 1980s and 90s.

REQUIREMENTS

- Regular presence (minimum: 80%) and active participation in the discussions.
- Regular reading of the mandatory texts (a course reader with selected texts will be provided online).
- Presentation of 20-25 minutes on a selected topic, based on at least four of the readings listed below each topic.
- Link to online reader: [http://gruppe.elba2.ch/11620/4kOqTzdd2q](http://gruppe.elba2.ch/11620/4kOqTzdd2q)
- Contact to the teaching assistant: cornelia.rueegg@gmw.gess.ethz.ch

SESSION PLAN

(✪ = mandatory readings available in the online Reader)

Session 1 (20.02.2014)  

a) Introduction to the course

b) Glimpses on the lived practice of Sikhism
   

Session 2 (06.03.2014)  

a) Historicising the founding father: The Sant movement and Guru Nanak (1469-1539)
   
b) From spiritual to worldly power: Militarisation of the Sikhs from the 17th to early 19th century


**Guru Nanak the putative founder of Sikhism and his nine successors (miniature painting, Punjab c. 1820).**

Session 3 (20. 03. 2014)  

a) External Pressures: Transformations under British colonial rule (1849-1920)

- Kerr, Ian, ‘Sikhs and State: Troublesome Relationships and a Fundamental Continuity with Particular Reference to the Peri-
b) Internal reforms: the Singh Sabha’s ‘Purification’ of Sikhism (1875–1914)


Session 4 (03. 04. 2014) a) Sikh migration and the end of colonial loyalty (1913-1920)


b) ‘The third Sikh war’: Militant Sikh politics (1920-1947)


o Purewal, Shinder, Sikh Ethnonationalism and the Political Economy of the Punjab, New Delhi 2000, pp. 119-63.


Session 6 (15.05.2014) a) ‘Imagined Homelands’: The role of the global Sikh Diaspora (1920-2000)


b) Caste and Gender in Sikhism


'Counterflows of empire': Sikhs in Britain (1962 and 2004)
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY


—, 'Sikh Politics in British Punjab prior to the Gurdwara Reform Movement'; in: O’Conell et al. (eds.), *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century*, Toronto 1988, pp. 159-90.


DOGRA, Ramesh Chander, *Encyclopaedia of Sikh religion and culture* - New Delhi [u.a.] 1996.


— (ed.), Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism (Textual Sources for the Study of Religion), Chicago 1990.


O’CONELL et al. (eds), Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century, Toronto 1988.


PUREWAL, Shinder, Sikh Ethnonationalism and the Political Economy of Punjab, Delhi 2000.


—, Encyclopaedia of Sikhism. Religion and Culture, 2 Vols. New Delhi

SHACKLE, Christopher et al.(ed.): Sikh religion, culture and ethnicity, Richmond 2001.


