

Shamans and Epic Poets of Central Asia

Spring Quarter 2006
BSLC 001 and Cobb 210 (for films)
Wednesdays, 1:30-4:20 PM.

Instructor: Kagan Arak
Mailbox: Pick 201 (CMES)
Office hours: by appointment (send email or see me in class).
Email: kagana@uchicago.edu

Course requirements:

1. Attendance and class participation.
2. Readings and discussion thereof.
3. Written reviews, 2-4 pp., of audio-visual materials presented in class.
4. Final work:

Option 1: in-class presentation of short research project pertaining to shamanism, healing, or oral tradition, with a summary write-up of 10 pages maximum, to be remitted in class. Can be done as a group project (3 people max.)

Option 2: longer individual research paper (15 pages max.)

Scope of course:

Keywords: “shamanism”, “animism”, “oral tradition”, “epic tradition”, Turkic peoples, Mongols, Siberian peoples, “religious syncretism”, “verbal and musical healing”.

Central Asia has been inhabited for millennia by diverse peoples, including those whose lifeways have been described as “nomadic”, and whose religious or spiritual traditions have been dubbed “shamanistic”. In this course, we explore the area broadly known as “Central Asia”, paying particular attention to its populations which descend from nomadic” and/or “shamanist” peoples. We examine the relationships between music and oral epic, performed by the “bard”, and “shamanic ritual”, performed by the “shaman”. We can examine the relationships between “shamanist religion” and “book religions”, which have helped shape some of the syncretic religious traditions in Central Asia. We will also take a comparative look at “shamanism” on a global scale.

Readings and audio-visual materials:

Suggested readings outlined in the reading list are all available in Regenstein, and will be on reserve starting at the beginning of the quarter. Additional handouts will be distributed in class. We will watch 3-4 video presentations this quarter, and we will also listen to recordings of oral epic performance and shamanic ritual. Viewing and listening to these materials are an integral part of the course curriculum. Please make up any absences (contact instructor to arrange for make-ups).