

Call for Applications: Mellon Sawyer Seminar Graduate Fellowships Religious Materiality in the Indian Ocean World, 1300-1800

How do material forms of religious culture reveal the historically contingent nature of translocal practices in the Indian Ocean world from 1300 to 1800? This seminar explores how contact between cultures and the circulation of objects resulted in patterns of decoding, the displacement of implicit ethnographies of the other, equivalence and refraction in terminology and structure, and the formation of transcultural identities. What are objects and what do they do for different communities who rely on them and use them to structure belief and ritual practice? In what ways are religious objects themselves commodities? How do social histories of religious objects transform and how are they transformed by the communities that use them? How does location give rise to intersecting and diverging constructions of religious space? How does language materialize religion?

A focus on religious materiality in the Indian Ocean world transcends the privileging texts and the written word among historians and religious studies scholars. Textual study alone fails to account for the dynamic intra- and inter-religious interactions that were fostered by material practices. We contend that material practices and objects travel in a way that differs from ideas, dogmas, and texts; access to the latter in their untranslated forms is restricted primarily to the elite. Material objects and practices due to their immediacy, on the other hand, reach out to and are shaped by subalterns—including the poor, the illiterate, and women—who have often been occluded from dominant histories. These traces point to modes of cultural interaction across linguistic, ethnic, class and religious boundaries that remain marginal in scholarship due in part to the regional specializations required by our own respective disciplines and area studies focus.

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has provided funding for two fellowships for graduate students in connection John E. Sawyer Seminar on “Religious Materiality in the Indian Ocean World, 1300-1800.” One graduate fellow will be appointed for the 2014-2015 academic year; a second graduate fellow will be appointed for the 2015-2016 academic year. Graduate Fellows will not teach courses. Graduate Fellows appointed during both the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 cycles of the Seminar will be invited to participate in all events connected with the Sawyer Seminar. The Fellowship includes a stipend of \$20,592 (inclusive of benefits).

Qualifications

University of Toronto graduate students in the humanities who are working on topics related to the theme of “religious materiality” and to the broader context of the Indian Ocean world will be considered.

Applicants must have completed all requirements other than the dissertation. Preference will be given to candidates in their 5th or 6th year (beyond their cohort funded year), although we will consider exceptionally well qualified ABD applicants.

Application Procedures

The following application materials must be sent electronically to indianocean.world@utoronto.ca

1. A curriculum vitae.
2. A University of Toronto transcript.
3. One writing sample (published or unpublished) that is no more than 35 pages long.
4. A brief cover letter describing your dissertation and research interests and how participating in the Seminar will enhance your major research project. Your cover letter should also include detailed research plans for the fellowship year.
5. Two letters of recommendation evaluating the candidate's research proposal.
 - Attachments should be in pdf form and must be labeled lastname.cv (your last name.item description)
 - Recommendation letters must be submitted via email by the recommender. Please include the following information on the subject line: Candidate Name: Recommendation Letter/Referee Name

Submission Deadline:

For the 2014-2015 Fellowship: 11:59pm on 10 September 2014

For the 2015-2016 Fellowship: TBA

If you have any questions, please contact Ajay Rao (ajay.rao@utoronto.ca) or Karen Ruffle (karen.ruffle@utoronto.ca)