

BOSTON UNIVERSITY

Department of History

History 349/African American 382

History of Religion in Pre-Colonial Africa

Dr. John Thornton

AAS 101 MW 10:10-11:25

Office hours MWF 9-10 and by appointment

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Office Hours: MWF 10:30-1:00 and by appointment. I am usually in my office, and welcome students to visit; I am not always available but if you contact me first I can tell you availability.

The purpose of this course will be to study the development of religion in Africa in the period before the European takeover of the continent. It will devote attention both to traditional religions of Africa and to the growth and development of Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the continent as a whole.

While there has been considerable study of religion in Africa, it has tended to be dominated either by a fairly static, ethnographic vision of African religion or a study of missionary, evangelical or proselytization activities of Christianity and Islam. This course will adopt a historical approach and will try to explore the underlying dynamics of religion, the bases of African religions, and the nature of conversions. It will also examine the interactions and underpinnings of religion's interaction with politics and with the politics of religious change.

This course is new, and its content is still very much in development. Students should be aware that you are on an adventure here, the secondary literature is limited, and some of our work will be in effect groundbreaking and dealing in unexplored territory reading directly from primary resources.

Requirements and Grading

The basic class format will be lecture-discussion, with outside readings. Grades will be based on the following:

Mid-Term	20% (1 March)
Two reactions	20% (10% each)
Term Paper	25% (26 April)
Final Exam	30% (TBD)
Attendance	5%

A term paper proposal is due on 15 March 2017

Each student will be required to write two **reaction papers**, and we will arrange the schedule when the class begins. The reaction paper will be to do that week's reading, which is composed of a primary and a secondary source, and try to make an analysis of the primary source in terms of themes and discussions that are taking place in the class, as well as the reading.

The **mid-term examination** will consist of 3 identification questions (out of 5), worth 30% of the grade, a question devoted specifically to the reading up to that point in the course (10%) followed by a choice of one out of two essay questions worth 60% of the grade.

The **final examination** will be two essay questions drawn from your choice of four questions (40% each), and a question based on one of the readings used since the mid-term (20%).

Students should attend all classes. If you must miss an examination or test inform me in advance, if possible. I expect all students to complete all work, so if you miss an exam, for any reason, schedule a make-up session after discussing the absence with me.

The class readings are either from the books, available for purchase at the BU Bookstore, or the other readings, which are all available in PDF format at the class website found at Blackboard on the course website.

The **term paper** will be a 10-12 page (3,500-4,200 words) research paper. The topic of the paper will be open to any issue raised in the course, or that deals with religion in Africa and its Diaspora before 1880.

Term papers should be based on a thesis. That is, each student should consider a controversial question that the history of this region and time period raises and propose an answer to it. The paper will then be a defense of the answer or thesis, in which data are arrayed to show why the thesis is true.

All students should supply me with written notice of their paper topic and thesis, as well as a brief bibliography. Although this will not be graded, it can provide me with a vehicle for helping you and allowing you to get your thoughts together. For best results, you should submit this proposal to me on the day of or before the mid-term examination.

Submit the proposal and the final paper to me by e-mail in Word or another compatible format such as RTF (if you use an iPad, please change the format). For best results give me a proposal as soon as we return from Spring Break (14 March). Do not submit these to my Boston University Account, but to nkuwu1491@yahoo.com. I will then mark these files and return them to you by e-mail.

If you have reasons to believe you cannot turn the paper in by its due date, inform me and discuss options. Late papers will be assessed a grade reduction of one third of a grade (ie an A becomes an A-) for each class sessions that the paper is late, but no paper will fail (below C) simply because of lateness. I expect each student to produce independent papers though I encourage students to discuss their ideas with each other and read and comment on each other's papers. Plagiarized papers will be dealt with according to the CAS Academic Conduct Code. This code can be found at <http://www.bu.edu/cas/students/undergrad-resources/code> (for undergrads) and <http://www.bu.edu/cas/students/grad-resources/forms/discipline> (for grad students).

Course Texts

John K Thornton, *The Kongolese Saint Anthony: Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the Antonian Movement, 1684-1706* (Cambridge University Press, 1998)

Nehemia Levtzion and Randall Pouwels, eds. *The History of Islam in Africa* (Columbus, OH, 2000)

Course Outline and Reading Assignments

The outside reading that is not in textbooks is found on Blackboard Learn under the course title "African Religion"

I have placed a series of files on Blackboard Learn based on the underlying research on which class lectures are based. They can serve as a textbook for the course, since their organization and contents are closely related to the class, and I encourage students to read these. Please understand that they are not a finished product, but are my own attempts to gather and make sense of the information I have gathered.

Note while the syllabus is divided into "topics," they are generally but not always for one week each. You should plan reading in accordance with what has already been covered in class.

Reading and Course Outline

Topic I Introduction

Introduction: Structure and issues

Topic II Ancient Nile Valley

The Ancient Nile Valley to the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty

Hellenistic Egypt/Kush/Axum

Reading: "The Memphite Theology" trans. Miriam Lichtheim.

Robert K. Rittner, "The Religious, Social and Legal Parameters of Traditional Egyptian Magic," in Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki, eds. *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power* (Leiden, 2001): 43-60.

Topic III Christianity in Northeast Africa

Hermetica/Christianity

Christianity outside the Nile Valley

Marlies Wendowski and Helmut Ziegert, "Axum at the Transition to Christianity,"

Annales d'Ethiopie 19 (2003): 215-230.

Kebrā Negast, ed. and trans. Wallace Budge, pp. 16-72.

Topic IV The Birth and Development of Islam

The development of Axum and the birth of Islam

Islamic consolidation

Reading: Richard Pankhurst, "Across the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden: Ethiopia's Historic Ties with Yaman," *Africa (Roma)* 57 (2002): 393-419.

Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of the Prophet* (trans. Guillaume), pp. 142-155.

Topic V The Western Sudan and Islam

Western Sudan: Religious background

Western Sudan: Islamization and its particularities

Reading: Nehemia Levtzion, "Islam and the Bilad al-Sudan to 1800," in Nehemia Levtzion and Randall Pouwels, eds. *The History of Islam in Africa* (Athens, OH, 2000), pp. 63-92.

Excerpts of al-Bakri, al-Idrisi and al-'Umari. in Nehemia Levtzion and P. Hopkins, *Corpus of Arabic Documents for the Study of West African History*.

Topic VI Northeast and North Central African Developments

Traditional religion and Islam in the Central Sudan

From Axum to the Kingdom of Ethiopia

Reading: Roderick Grierson, "Dreaming of Jerusalem," in Marylyn Heldman and Stuart Munro-Hay, *African Zion: The Sacred Art of Ethiopia* (New Haven and London, 1993), pp. 5-17.

"The Kano Chronicle" ed H. R. Palmer

Topic VII Islam in the Nile Valley and East African Coast

Christianity and Islam in Nubia to 1500

East African coast

Reading: Randall Pouwels, "The East African Coast, 780-1800," in Levtzion and Pouwels, *History of Islam*, pp. 251-72.

Al-Mas'udi, description of Kilwa's religion, internet translation

Topic VIII European Expansion

European Christianity and missionary religion

Mid-term Examination

Reading: Stuart Clark, "Magic and Witchcraft," in Anthony Molho and Diogo Ramado Curto, eds. *Finding Europe: Discourses on Margins, Communities, Images* (Berghahn: 2007) pp. 115-31.

Alonso de Espinosa, *The Origins and Miracles of our Lady of Candelaria* pp. 46-64.

Topic IX Religious Life of the Upper Guinea Coast

Tradition and Islam in Upper Guinea

Upper Guinea and Jihads

Reading: Manuel Álvares, "Minor Ethiopia".

Robert Baum, *Shrines of the Slave Trade: Diola Religion and Society in Precolonial Senegambia* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 85-107.

Topic X Religious Life of the Lower Guinea Coast

Akan and the Bight of Benin: Religious developments

Benin and the Bight of Biafara

Reading: Wilhelm Johann Müller, "The Idolatry, Unbelief, and Superstition of the Fetu People," in Adam Jones, ed. and trans. *German Sources for West African History*, pp. 158-81.

Olabibi Babalola Yai, "From Vodun to Mawu: Monotheism and History in the Fon Cultural Area," *L'invention religieuse en Afrique: Histoire et religion en Afrique Noire* (Paris, 1993), pp. 241-63.

Topic XI Central Africa: Christianity and Tradition

Traditional religion foundations
Christianity in Kongo and Portuguese Angola
Reading: Olifert Dapper's Description of Loango religion.
Thornton, *The Kongolese Saint Anthony*.

Topic XII Southern Africa

Religion and social organization in South Africa
The Nguni regions
Reading: Peter Kolb, *The Present State of the Cape of Good Hope*, pp. 91-111.
Jennifer Weir, "Whose Unkulunkulu?" *Africa* 75 (2005): 203-219.

Topic XIII Southeast Africa and the Portuguese

Southeast Africa and Portuguese Mozambique
East Africa and Ethiopia
Reading: André Fernandes Letters and João dos Santos, "Eastern Ethiopia" cap 8-9, in George Theal, *Records of Southeastern Africa* (Cape Town) vol 2, pp. 61-128; vol 7, pp. 196-201.
David Sperling, "The Coastal Hinterland and the Interior of East Africa," in Levtzion and Pouwels, pp. 273-302.
(revisit Pouwels' contribution from Week VII)

Topic XIV Religious Reform in West Africa

The great Jihads of the nineteenth century
The African Diaspora (if time permits)
Reading: David Robinson, "Revolutions in the Western Sudan," in Levtzion and Pouwels, *History of Islam in Africa*, pp. 131-152.
Mervin Hiskett, ed and trans. "*Kitab al-Farq: A Work on the Habe Kingdoms Attributed to 'Uthman dan Fodio*, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 23 (1960): 558-79.