

## World Historical Association 2017

**Leah Gregory** (Advisors: Professor Elizabeth Pollard and Professor Paula DeVos)

Title: Did Women Have an Axial Age? Gender and Cosmic Reciprocity

Abstract:

Venerated phrases like the “birth of compassion” and “the age of transcendence” have been used to describe the period between 800-200 BCE, a time defined as the “Axial Age” by German philosopher Karl Jaspers. Jaspers’s Axial Age theory advocated a “universal” human history by establishing a new point of common origin characterized by the emergence of multiple religious traditions across the globe. Some scholars agree that the 1st millennium BCE corresponds to a watershed moment in human cognitive development (Eisenstadt, 2011; Bellah, 2013). Others suggest that philosophical transformations in the period were initiated by innovations in energy capture and eclipsing previous thresholds of affluence, rather than the result of human maturation (Baumard and Boyer, 2013). However, the debate surrounding the Axial Age, regardless of theoretical purview, is blatantly devoid of any discussion of women.

In the spirit of Joan Kelly’s “Did Women Have a Renaissance?,” this study examines textual sources---in particular, representative excerpts from the Buddhist Pali Canon, the Analects of Confucius, and the Hebrew Bible---for evidence of women’s experience of an Axial Age, or if they even had one. The scope of selected excerpts in this paper have been narrowed to passages regarding “cosmic reciprocity,” a subset of characteristics of Axial Age philosophy.

This analysis represents one component of my larger project, “Did Women Have an Axial Age?,” which will establish that if there was indeed an Axial transformation, it was an unquestionably male experience, rendering its universality void, and the periodization itself fatally flawed.

**Sarah Kemp** (Advisors: Professor Elizabeth Pollard and Professor Walter Penrose, Jr.)

Title: Sacred Women in Christianity and Buddhism: A Comparison of Mary, Avalokitesvara, and Guanyin from 300-900 CE

Abstract:

The question of why Buddhism had only diffused into East Asia and not the Mediterranean World has been largely left unanswered. This paper compares Christianity’s Virgin Mary with the Mahayana bodhisattva Avalokitesvara and her Chinese counterpart Guanyin to show the likeness of the Mahayana bodhisattva(s) and Mary should have allowed Buddhism to be imported and adapted in the Christian Mediterranean. While scholars have undertaken comparisons of Mary and Guanyin in the past, much of the scholarship only parallels the two sacred women as images of mercy and their scriptural significance in their respective religions. This paper, however, takes these conclusions one-step further by using these commonalities to hypothesize that Buddhism should have found fertile soil and been adapted in the Christian Mediterranean world if it had traveled on the Silk Road west of the Parthian Empire after the second century.

A textual source analysis of the Lotus Heart Sutras illustrates the significance of Avalokitesvara and Guanyin within Buddhism and biblical books, such as the Gospel of Luke and Revelations, to comprehend Mary's place within Christianity. Images of the bodhisattvas from Buddhist art sites, such as the Mogao Caves, and Mary, such as the "Our Lady of Rome" from the 5th century, will be compared to show images of veneration worship. Cultural and textual analysis of the art and sacred texts of both Christianity and Buddhism are used in this paper to better understand cross-cultural exchange and religious adaptation occurring along the Silk Road between Eurasia.

**Christine Wong** (Advisors: Professor Elizabeth Pollard and Professor Walter Penrose, Jr.)

Title: *Materia Medica of Rome and Han China*

Abstract:

Scholars have traditionally compared the Greco-Roman culture of antiquity with that of early China to identify world historical trends. Research has primarily focused on broad issues such as military expansion or political structures, with recent attempts shifting towards cultural history (Lloyd & Sivin 2002, Tanner 2009). Although valuable, the studies lack an in depth focus and overlook key pieces of evidence. A remedy to this lacuna is to closely examine the pharmacological materials used in Rome and China to explore sociocultural issues through the lens of medicine and religion.

A textual analysis of sources describing the preparation and uses of medicinal herbs from the Roman Empire and Han China provides an avenue of comparison and contrast between medical treatments tied to religious and cultural ideas of both traditions. In Rome, healing rituals found within the Greek Magical Papyri (2nd century BCE – 5th century CE) are associated with the preparation of medical plants through magical rituals. In China, the Inner Canon of the Yellow Emperor (3rd century BCE – 3rd century CE) categorizes different classes of plants to be used for pharmacological purposes, reflecting the understanding of the natural world imbued with religious undertones.

Explorations into the plants and herbs used for medicinal purposes in the Roman Empire and Han China reveal the ways in which ancients understood and interacted with the natural world. Within the minutiae of interaction through globalization, we can trace the changes in religion and philosophy as the response to developments in world history.

**Samantha Young** (Advisors: Professor Elizabeth Pollard and Professor Walter Penrose, Jr.)

Title: *Recasting Jewish Magic: Female Responses to Changes in World History*

"And the Angels taught their mortal wives incantation, the cutting of roots, the seeing of stars, the course of the moon, as well as the deception of man. And the people cried and their voice reached unto heaven." This passage from the Book of Enoch (2nd century BCE) illustrates the religious ideologies of women's relationship with magic, but lacks a historical investigation that would reveal scholarly understanding. The scope of scholarly inquiry has been limited both temporally and spatially, emphasizing only trends in Biblical, ancient Mediterranean, and Medieval Jewish Magic practices. While scholarship has treated these as disparate phenomena,

an attempt to synthesize such knowledge into a composite whole has been absent from scholars' discussions. An amalgamation would demonstrate the continuity within the aforementioned traditions across time and space.

Through a comparative analysis of Jewish Women's Magic practices found within the Hebrew Bible and contemporaneous pseudoapocryphal texts, ranging from the Levant of biblical antiquity, to ancient Rome, and to Medieval Europe, this paper explores the responses in Jewish Women's Magic to developments and influences in World History.

Such an analysis demonstrates not only changes in magic practices, but also highlights the ways in which Jewish women responded to challenges posed by an increasingly interconnected Afroeurasia, and the threats posed to ethnic identity by nascent globalization. This paper offers a gendered image of World history revealing the modes in which magic served as a vehicle of agency for Jewish women, whose gender and religion would otherwise proscribe their historical experience to a veritable *damnatio memoriae*.