A Note from the Chair

Classes for the fall term of 2009 ended yesterday, and we are in that liminal state of exam time when the campus is quiet, the libraries are full of tired and hard-working students, and faculty are poring over papers and tests. What better time to stop and reflect on the last year.

Our fall has been filled with outstanding new teachers and graduate students, news of jobs, books and births from our wonderful alumni, and hope for continued growth and exploration in the new year.

One of the most anticipated events is a celebration of the 25th anniversary of the founding of our doctoral program (way back in 1985!). On October 8-9, 2010, we will gather as many former students and faculty as possible to reflect on all that has come about since then. Religious Studies at UNC has grown into a vibrant and vitally important community of research.

In intervening years not only have we trained dozens of students who are now teaching at colleges, universities and seminaries all over the country, but we have developed new undergraduate minors in Jewish Studies, Islamic Studies, and Christianity and Culture. Our faculty conduct research on religion in Nepal, Japan, the Middle East, and the Caribbean as well as the United States and Europe.

We have much to celebrate. In particular, we are grateful for the continuing support of all of you who understand the increasing importance of the work we do in our world.

Thank you!

Dr. Laurie Maffly-Kipp
Department Chair

New Faculty Profile: Evyatar Marienberg

This September, the Department was pleased to welcome Evyatar Marienberg as Assistant Professor and E.J. and Sara Evans Fellow of Jewish History and Culture. Marienberg comes to UNC from The Jewish Theological Seminary, where he was assistant professor of Talmud and Rabbinics. His research interests include Rabbinics, Social history of Jews and Christians in medieval Europe, and contemporary Catholicism. The unique nature of the Religious Studies Department allows him to pursue each of these interests simultaneously—this fall, for example, he taught courses on Jewish legal literature and contemporary Catholicism.

Born in Israel, Marienberg has studied at Yeshivat Ha-Kibbutz ha-Dati of Ein-Tzurim, the Institut Catholique de Paris, and the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes en Sorbonne. In addition to The Jewish Theological Seminary, he has also taught at Yeshiva University, McGill University, the Peideia Institute in Stockholm, as well as Tel Aviv University. He has done postdoctoral work at the University of Notre Dame and was a Starr Fellow at Harvard in the spring of 2008.

Faculty News & Notes

Barbara Ambros, Assistant Professor, was recently elected President of the Society for the Study of Japanese Religions.

Bart Ehrman, James A. Gray Distinguished Professor, received a fellowship from the National Humanities Center for the academic year 2009-10. While on departmental leave with this fellowship, he is working on a scholarly monograph dealing with the use of literary forgery in the early Christian tradition.

Carl W. Ernst, William R. Kenan, Jr., Distinguished Professor (pictured), was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in a ceremony held in Cambridge, Massachusetts on October 10, 2009.

Todd Ochoa, Assistant Professor, was awarded a Junior Faculty Development Grant for his ongoing fieldwork in rural Cuba.

Barry Saunders, Adjunct Associate Professor, was awarded the first annual Gregory Bate- son Prize by the Society for Cultural Anthropology, for his book CT Suite: The Work of Diagnosis in the Age of Noninvasive Cutting (Duke University Press, 2008).

Our Newest Students

This fall, we were pleased to welcome four new graduate students into the department:

Andrew AghaPour: Religion and Culture
Shannon Barry: Religion in the Americas
Matthew Hotham: Islamic Studies
Stanley Thayne: Religion in the Americas

For more information on their educational background and research interests, please visit: http://religion.unc.edu/people/gradstudents.shtml

Save the Date

Join us!

October 8 & 9, 2010

As We Celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the Founding of the Department of Religious Studies Doctoral Program

Details to Follow
Chad Seales writes to say that he has begun a tenure-track job at George Mason University. Since he is now driving distance from Chapel Hill, he plans on attending the 25th anniversary celebration. George Demacopoulos received tenure and promotion in the summer of 2008. Along with a colleague, he started the first Orthodox Christian Studies Program in the country. So far, the program has raised 2.5 million and they recently arranged to bring the Patriarch of Constantinople to campus for an honorary degree. Rabia Gregory was awarded an AAR Research Grant for 2009-2010, along with several other grants. She also attended an NEH summer seminar on book history (in Antwerp, Oxford, and London) and spent time researching in Europe. Roderic Mullen writes: “Didn’t realize it’s been 25 years since the PhD program began. I first heard about it from Jack Sasson and from Dimitry Cozby who worked in Davis Library. I started in fall 1986, so while I cannot quite claim to have been there ab initio, I must be one of the dinosaurs by now. I was the first to earn a PhD in the Ancient Mediterranean Religions concentration.” In terms of publications, Mark D. Given’s book Paul Unbound was published this fall through Hendrickson Publishers, Quincy Newell also has a book out with the University of New Mexico Press, titled Constructing Lives at Mission San Francisco: Native Californians and Hispanic Colonists, 1776-1821, and Thomas Pearson’s book, Missions and Conversions: Creating the Montagnard-Dega Refugee Community, has found a home at Palgrave Macmillan. Joanne Seiff tells us “I’m a fulltime writer and educator. I’ve written two books, published in 2009 by John Wiley & Sons, Fiber Gathering and Knit Green: 20 Projects & Ideas for Sustainability.” She also continues to write about religious issues and has recently published articles in The Jewish Week and Kolot. Her husband, Jeff Marcus, took a position as the Canadian Research Chair in Phylogenomics at the University of Manitoba this past fall. Among the more recent graduates, Isaac Weiner, who received his PhD this August, is now working as Assistant Professor of American Religions at Georgia State University. But, he writes, “Far more important is that Rayna and I are happy to announce the birth of our son, Dov Francis Weiner, on August 30, 2009, at 4:35pm, weighing in at 8lbs, 1 oz., and 20.5 inches long.” And finally, Brantley Gasaway started a position as Assistant Professor of American Religious Studies at Bucknell University this past August. He writes: “In April, my wife Katie gave birth to our second daughter (Anna); our oldest (Eleanor) is now 4 and a half.”

Have News? E-mail it to RSalums@unc.edu

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Be sure to write “Department of Religious Studies, Fund # 1331” in the memo line of your check.

The Unconverted Self by Jonathan Boyarin
University of Chicago Press, 2009

Jonathan Boyarin’s The Unconverted Self: Jews, Indians and the Identity of Christian Europe was nearly twenty years in the making. Boyarin, trained as an anthropologist of modern East European Jewry rather than as a Latin Americanist or medieval Europeanist, was frustrated at the exclusion of Jews and Jewishness from the emerging postcolonial discourse in the late eighties and early nineties. “It was obvious to me,” he says, “that the tendency was to see Jews as ‘already Europeans,’ somehow either complicit with or invisible in the colonial encounter. It was also obvious to me that Latin Christians’ encounter with the Jewish ‘other within,’ and their encounter with the colonized ‘other without,’ should be seen instead as part of one integrated process of making and unmaking Christian Europe. And that’s obviously an endless topic, so this short book should really be seen—and I conclude by saying this—as an invitation to a necessary conversation about power, universality and the dimensions of difference.”

Memories of Muhammad by Omid Safi
HarperOne, 2009

In Memories of Muhammad, Why the Prophet Matters, Omid Safi presents a portrait of Muhammad that reveals his centrality in the devotions of modern Muslims around the world. This religious biography presents Muhammad as a lens through which to view both the genesis of Islamic religion and the grand sweep of Islamic history—right up to the hot button issues of the day. It also provides a rare glimpse into how Muslims spiritually connect to God through their Prophet, in the mosque, in the home, and even in cyberspace. Safi said “I really feel like it’s my responsibility to translate these teachings from Persian to English and from Arabic to English and from a medieval world to a 21st century world.”

Jesus, Interrupted by Bart D. Ehrman
HarperOne, January 2010

Bart Ehrman’s New York Times Bestseller, Jesus, Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible (And Why We Don’t Know About Them) will be released in paperback in early 2010. In this follow-up to Misquoting Jesus, Ehrman reveals the complex history of the composition of the New Testament—a history unknown to the general public. In promoting this controversial book, Ehrman has appeared on numerous radio and TV shows, including NPR’s Fresh Air with Terri Gross and the Colbert Report.