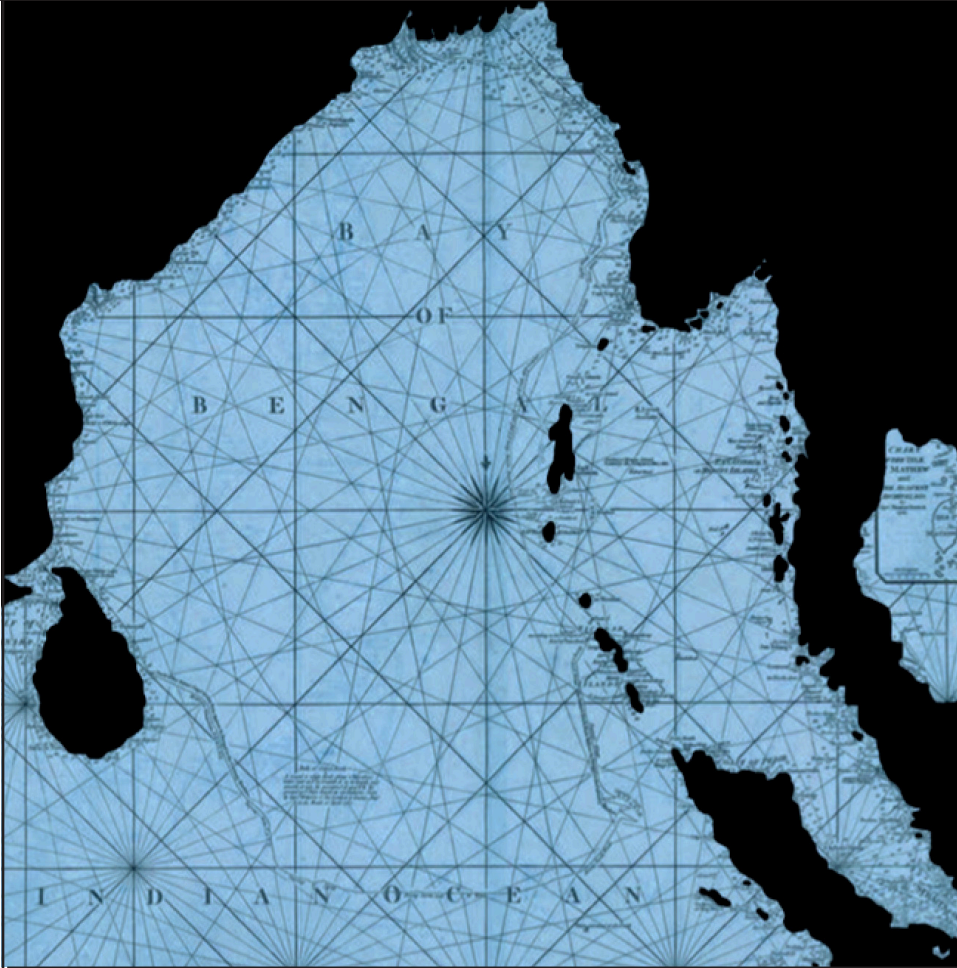


4.625J / 11.378J

Water Planning, Policy and Design

WOVEN WATERS: ISLAM AND THE BAY OF BENGAL



*"Picture the Bay of Bengal as an expanse of tropical water: still and blue in the calm of the January winter, or raging and turbid with silt at the peak of the summer rains. Picture it in two dimensions on a map, overlaid with a web of shipping channels and telegraph cables and inscribed with lines of distance. Now imagine the sea as a mental map: as a family tree of cousins, uncles, sisters, sons, connected by letters and journeys and stories. Think of it as a sea of debt, bound by advances and loans and obligations. Picture the Bay... even where it is absent... Today one in four of the world's people lives in a country that borders the Bay of Bengal. More than half a billion people live directly on the coastal rim that surrounds it. This is a region that has long been central to the history of globalization: shaped by migration, as culturally mixed as any place on earth, and at the forefront of the commodification of nature... The coastal frontiers of the Bay are among the most vulnerable in the world to climate change; they are densely populated, ecologically fragile, and at the fault lines of new dreams of empire."*

**Sunil S. Amrith**  
*Crossing the Bay of Bengal (2013)*

This seminar situates the Bay of Bengal, within the larger body of the Indian Ocean, as a center of globalization dating from ancient times to today. This eastern half of what has been referred to as "an Islamic Sea" is the meeting point of South Asian cultures and China, two regional superpowers of the past posed to regain their global supremacy going forward.

The seminar will create a visual and written record – an atlas of sorts – of the web of cultures, languages, religions, migrations, resources, trade, architectures, and power structures that have bound this bay together over human history. It will examine this within regional environmental conditions, both seasonal and long-term change, and local through international policies and agreements that have framed the trajectories of occupation and land use. Throughout, the seminar will highlight the role that Islam has played it forming the unique character of what today, once again, is being seen as a center of dialogue, exchange and identity, rather than as a dividing line between distinct peoples, nations and regions.

Readings will range from historic traveler's accounts to modern scholarship and contemporary literature.

**SPRING 2015**

DAY	Monday
TIME	9:00 - 12:00
ROOM	5-216
PROF	Elizabeth Hermann <i>ehermann@risd.edu</i>
TA	Huma Gupta <i>guptah@mit.edu</i>
UNITS	306 H

ENROLLMENT: Limited to 15 PREREQUISITE: Permission of Instructor

**SA + P**