

NYU—Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies Dept. **Prof. Tamer el-Leithy** (tamer.elleithy@nyu.edu)
Lectures: T and Th 11:00-12:15 pm Office: 413 King Juan Carlos
Bi-weekly Discussion Sections: W 6-7 pm; Th 6-7 pm; or Fri 11-12 pm Office hours: T 2-4 pm

V77.0640 / V57.0542 – *The Making of the Muslim Middle East, 600-1200 A.D.*

This course will examine the major social, cultural and political transformations of the Middle East from the late-antique era through the twelfth century A.D. in the context of the evolution of Islamic culture and polity. In addition to a general survey of social and political developments, the course will examine key concepts, institutions, and cultural motifs of the medieval Islamic tradition. Weekly lectures are structured as follows:

- A. Tuesdays will be devoted to a diachronic survey of historical events (hereafter, A modules);
- B. Thursdays will consist of synchronic examinations of important concepts, institutions, practices, and themes in the medieval Middle East (B modules).

The majority of the course readings come from secondary sources, but will be supplemented with primary sources on the topics addressed in the B-module thematic lectures.

This course presents a *social and cultural history of religion* (unlike a religious studies course that focuses on theology, ritual, etc.). And as the title indicates, we shall focus on the Middle East and will therefore not cover the history of Islam in North or sub-Saharan Africa, Andalusia (Islamic Spain), the Indian subcontinent, or Southeast Asia.

Class Requirements

Students are expected to attend *all lectures* and actively participate in the smaller discussion sections. *Five* unexcused absences result in an automatic F.

Discussion sections meet for one hour once every two weeks: three sections will be available for students to choose from; once registered in one (e.g. the Friday section), however, students are expected to attend *only* that slot. Only in emergencies—or individual substitutions, pre-announced and -approved by me—will substitutions be allowed.

Occasionally, I will hand out a **Quick Quiz** with **five multiple-choice questions** at the beginning of class. The questions address very basic, key issues in the week's assigned readings; if you've done the readings, you will have no problem recognizing the correct answer in the five minutes allowed. Quizzes *will not be announced*—and missing a class in which I give a quiz counts as a **zero** (there will be no make-ups); but I will also drop your lowest grade when averaging your quiz scores.

Grades will be assigned as follows:

- 25% **Attendance** and participation, including **six Quick Quizzes** on weekly readings (see above)
- 15% **Three Short Response Essays:** One- to two-page critiques of, or responses to, the primary readings on B-module themes. You may choose from any of the assigned *primary* readings; if you wish to write on an external *primary* source, you must first clear it with me.
- 25% In-class **Midterm Exam** (Thursday, Oct. 18) consisting of multiple-choice, map-identification, and short-answer questions.
- 35% **Final Exam**—scheduled for the last class (Tuesday, Dec. 11)—consisting of a series of questions to be answered in short-essay form (students will answer three of five questions).
Upon my approval, you may submit a **research paper** (15-25 pages) in lieu of the final exam on an approved topic related to medieval Middle Eastern history. Final papers are due Tuesday Dec. 14.

Readings *“Do not read superficially, lest you do me an injury, and derive no benefit for yourself. You must study thoroughly and read continually; for you will then find the solution of those important problems of religion, which are a source of anxiety to all intelligent men.”*

– Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed

Pay heed to Maimonides. You are responsible for completing all assigned reading—carefully, critically, and thoughtfully—before coming to class. Occasionally, I provide a few points or questions to guide you (e.g. what to look for in a text, or how it may differ from another), but you are responsible for asking your own active questions of the texts, rather than languishing in passive reading.

Writing *Plagiarism will result in an automatic F for the course.* Keep all your notes and source material and be prepared to explain any writing you submit. In your responses/critiques and exam essays (or paper), I am looking for indications that you have read thoughtfully and engaged the material originally and critically. An essay is an argument; I need not agree with yours, but I expect it to be coherent, logically supported and to persuasively develop the issues raised in class.

Primary Source Responses Primary sources provide an example of the actual texture of medieval texts and their worlds—the context of their production and audience; the social realities they recount and represent. The short-response essays are intended to provide students with exposure to, and first-hand experience of, the task of historical inquiry: how can a text or an individual illuminate the cultural history of a social group or people? How can interpretive biases condition—if not completely shape—the image derived from a specific text? Students are encouraged to explore historiographical questions through the comparison of different modern readings of the same medieval text or event.

A Note on Historical Context and Analysis

History is the complex dialectic of the dynamics of continuity and change; similarly a culture is the interplay of unity and diversity. Good historical analysis and understanding does not sacrifice this complexity in favor of neat, simplistic sound-bites, or convenient but flawed comparisons. Essentialism is the enemy of historical analysis, which eschews representing cultures as static or monolithic.

It is important to note the temporal frame of this course: we will investigate late antique and medieval history—and not the modern world. Of course, as we will see (especially in particular modules like B5), all historical inquiries, as well as the answers they uncover, are intimately conditioned by modern concerns. Because of this complexity, it is important to scrupulously avoid anachronism—and to note that we are not studying the modern world. Furthermore, it is crucial not to make simplistic equations between the medieval and modern worlds—i.e. not to *assume* historical continuities not in evidence; nor to make the now-familiar, if flippant and asinine, suppositions about certain contemporary cultures being ‘medieval.’ Finally, we must always question deterministic models that posit that a culture or civilization’s historical origins (or scripture) can exclusively predict its future.

The Making of the Muslim Middle East—Weekly Outline

week	A. Tuesdays: Historical Chronology	B. Thursdays: Themes
0	Sept. 4— Introduction <i>Two Medieval Paintings from Tabriz & Venice</i>	Sept. 6— The Study of Medieval Islamic History Methodological & Theoretical Points; Politics of History...
1	Sept. 11— The World in Which Islam Appeared Religion & Empire in Late-Antique Near East; Pre-Islamic Arabia: Meccan trade; Polytheism	Sept. 13— Sources and Historiography Extant Sources of Medieval ME History: Historiography: The Debate on Islamic Origins Fallacies in Historical Reasoning.
2	Sept. 18— Muhammad in Mecca (610-22) Revelation and the Emergence of Islam	Sept. 20— Scripture Qur'an & Exegesis; Meccan vs. Medinan <i>Suras</i>
3	Sept. 25— Muhammad in Medina (622-32) The First Muslim Society/Polity: <i>Constitution of Medina</i> The Prophet's Death and the Wars of Apostasy	Sept. 27— The Prophet Muhammad The <i>Sira</i> (Prophet's Biography) <i>Hadith</i> and <i>Hadith</i> Criticism
4	Oct. 2— The Prophet's Successors (632-61) The Rashidun (Four Rightly-Guided Caliphs) The <i>Umma's</i> Rapid Imperial Expansion	Oct. 4— Conquests & the Spread of Islam Religious vs. Linguistic Conversion [Iran ↔ Egypt] <i>Historical Models of Religious Conversion: Bulliet</i>
5	Oct. 9— Islam Islamic Creed & Ritual (Five Pillars); From Believers to Muslims: The Development of Muslim Religious Identity (Dome of the Rock)	Oct. 11— Inter-faith Relations Non-Muslims (Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, Hindus) Dhimmis and the Pact of 'Umar <i>Politics of Historiography on Medieval Non-Muslims</i>
6	Oct. 16— The Umayyads (661-750) Creating an Islamic State: <i>Diwan</i> & Coin Reform First & Second <i>Fitna</i> : Religion & Political Dissent	Oct. 18: Midterm Exam (Map Identification; Multiple Choice; Short Answers)
7	Oct. 23— 'Abbasids I: When Baghdad Ruled the World! Critiques of Umayyad Government The 'Abbasid Revolution & Golden Age (8th-9th c.)	Oct. 25— 'Abbasid Culture Translation Movement: Greek Philosophy in Arabic Mu'tazili Rationalist Philosophy
8	Oct. 30— 'Abbasids II: Internal Tensions Civil War & the <i>Mihna</i> (early 9th c.) ↔ <i>Medieval Latin Inquisitions (e.g. Languedoc)</i> Orthodoxy & Moral Regulation ↔ <i>Orthodoxy & the Church in Medieval Europe</i>	Nov. 2— 'Ulama' (Religious Scholars) Scholars and Rulers (the State): Ideals and Realities Puritans in 9th-c. Baghdad & 14th-c. Damascus <i>Case-Study: Ordering the Good & Forbidding Wrong</i> Women Scholars/Hadith Transmitters
9	Nov. 6— 'Abbasids III: Decline & Fragmentation Fragmentation of the Caliphate Political Thought—Power, Authority, Legitimacy: Caliph vis-à-vis Sultan Turkic Military Slaves: the Mamluk System	Nov. 8— Sectarian Developments Kharijites Emerging Shi'i Identities Heresiology and Sunni Islam
10	Nov. 13— The Shi'i Century & The Sunni Revival Shi'i Dynasties of the 11th c.: Fatimids & Buyids The 12th-c. Sunni Revival: Salah ad-Din & the Seljuks <i>On the Turks</i>	Nov. 15— Consolidation of "Sunni" Islam Classical Islamic Institutions: <i>Madrasa</i> and <i>Waqf</i> ↔ <i>Universities in medieval Europe</i> <i>Al-Ghazali (d. 1111)</i>
11	Nov. 20— A History of Islamic Law (Shari'a) Social Logic of the <i>Fatwa</i> (Legal Responsum) Legal Multiplicity: The Four Mutually-Recognized, Orthodox 'Schools' of Law [<i>Madhabib</i>] Status of Consensus & Disagreement on Relig. Law <i>C-S: Are the Gates of Ijtihad (Indep. Reasoning) Closed?</i>	Nov. 22— Marriage, Family, and Sexuality Sexuality and Birth Control Polygyny and Concubinage Divorce and Child Custody Women as Property Owners, Endowers, and Workers
12	Nov. 27— Crusades I: Latin Kingdoms Sanctifying Spaces: Martyrdom, Jihad, Holy Sites Papal Bulls & Italian Commerce During Crusades	Nov. 29— Peoples, Places, Things Ethnicity: Geography, Travel, Marvel, Poetry Arabs and Persians: the <i>Shu'ubiyya</i> Movement (9th c.) Muslims on the Pre-Islamic Past: Egypt ↔ Iran
13	Dec. 4— Crusades II: Who are the Rank, Hairy Brutes? <i>Memoirs of a Syrian Gentleman: Usama ibn al-Munqidh</i>	Dec. 6— Popular Religion and Culture Popular Preaching and Story-Telling Sufism: Poetry; Orders; Master-Disciple relations
14	Dec. 11— Last class: Final Exam (short essays)	Research Paper (in lieu of Final) due: Fri, Dec. 14