

History of Islamic Societies to 1500

Professor: Laura Bier
Office: Old CE G-21
Office Hours: Thurs. 10-11:30 or by appointment
Phone: 404-509-9543
e-mail: laura.bier@hts.gatech.edu

Course Description and Logistics

This course is a survey of the Middle East from pre-Islamic times to the establishment of Ottoman rule. It traces the development of Islamic society, with particular attention paid to the plurality of cultures that comprised the region. It seeks to juxtapose several historical narratives: the political, the economic, the social, and the cultural in order to provide a broad conceptualization of the pre-modern history of the area. In addition to contemporary scholarship, primary sources in translation are used. Specific themes that we will explore include: the institutional and spiritual formations of Muslims, political structures, literary and artistic creations of Islamic civilization, war and conquest, travel and trade.

Among the questions we will consider:

- How did the Middle East become Islamic? To what extent do the Islamic forms of government, social organization, and culture represent continuity or discontinuity with already existing conditions in the territories to which Islam spread?
- Is there a worldwide unity of Islamic culture? At what points can we speak of a unified Islamic civilization? On what basis? What are the points of regional variation in the Islamic world?
- How did people view themselves and their societies? What categories (social, religious, legal political etc) made up the fabric of everyday life?
- How important are historical legacies for understanding the present day?

Required Texts (Available at the Engineers Bookstore)

Francis Robinson (ed) *Illustrated History of the Islamic World*
Amin Maalouf: *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes*
Amitav Ghosh *In an Antique Land*

Supplementary materials:

Other required readings are available in T-Square in the "Resources" section in the folder designated for the week's lectures.

Grading

Participation: 25%

Reaction Papers, coffee debate and other misc. in-class activities

Midterm: 30%

Final: 30%

Book Report: 15%

Reaction Papers

To facilitate discussion, students are required to write 5 informal papers based on the readings. These "reaction papers" are designed to get you thinking and to give you an opportunity to reflect on the issues raised by the course. They should be approximately one page double spaced (300 words). These posts are not intended as summaries; they are exercises in critical thinking and an opportunity to digest and synthesize course material--to formulate questions, suggest alternative interpretations and shape our discussion. They will be graded on a pass/fail (satisfactory/unsatisfactory) basis and will count towards your participation grade. In general, while I expect you to adhere to some basic standards of grammar, spelling and presentation, these posts are more intended to give you an opportunity to reflect critically on the issues raised in lecture and in the course readings than they are to be formal writing assignments. Papers are due **by 8 am the day of class**. You should post your reactions in the "Drop Box" section of T-Square, where each of you has their own folder.

Book Report

The final assignment for this class is a critical essay on the book *In an Antique Land*. The essay should be five to seven pages, double spaced using 12 point font. I will give you a separate handout providing more details of how to think about the assignment closer to their due date.

Course Policies and Procedures

Honor Code

Students in this class will be expected to abide by the Georgia Tech Honor Code and avoid any instance of academic misconduct, including but not limited to the substitution of material that is wholly or substantially identical to that created or published by another individual or individuals; false claims of performance or work submitted by the student; possessing, using, or exchanging *improperly* acquired written or verbal information in preparation for, or in writing, an exam or paper. If you have any questions, please consult with me and read the Honor Code, which is available at:

www.deanofstudents.gatech.edu/Policy/code.in.sections.htm#AHC .

Communication and E-mail policy

I encourage you to contact me concerning questions or problems you may have in relation to the course by coming to office hours. Office hours provide an extra occasion to discuss the contents of the course and questions you may have about the material. Office hours are also an opportunity to talk broadly about historical or philosophical ideas you may wish to explore further or things which may be outside the confines of the class. I enjoy visitors and office hours are boring if no one comes, so you'll be doing me a favor. Note: *Unless your question requires only a quick (mostly yes or no) answer or you are notifying me of technical problems with T-square, email should be avoided.* If you cannot make it to office hours, we can schedule another time to meet. Also, I do not respond to e-mail after 5 pm in the evening or on Saturday or Sunday, so please try and plan accordingly.

Participation and Classroom Conduct

Participation is a significant part of your grade in this class. You are expected to come to class prepared to contribute actively to classroom discussions and activities. This will not only enhance your own learning experience but the experience of your fellow students. Good participation entails not only speaking and sharing your thoughts on a regular basis, but also being considerate and respecting the views of others. To earn high points in the participation part of the final grade, students will have demonstrated their awareness of the different functions of classroom comments by:

1. varying their discussion strategies,
2. considering what they say before they say it,
3. taking intellectual risks, and
4. always respecting the feelings of peers by not interrupting classmates while speaking and acknowledging interesting ideas.

Any successful learning experience requires mutual respect on the part of the student and the instructor. Neither instructor nor student should be subject to others' behavior that is rude, disruptive, intimidating, or demeaning. The instructor has primary responsibility for and control over classroom behavior and maintenance of academic integrity.

Instructor responsibilities:

- Start and end class on time.
- Treat all students with courtesy and respect.
- Be open to constructive input from students in the course.
- Ensure that opportunities to participate are enjoyed equally by all students in the course.

Student responsibilities:

- Come to class on time, and refrain from packing up belongings before class ends.
- Turn off all electronic devices that might create a disruption in class.

- Be quiet and give full respectful attention while either instructor or another student is speaking.
- When speaking, use courteous, respectful language and keep comments and questions relevant to the topic at hand.

I expect you to fulfill your responsibilities to me and to your fellow students. By the same token, if I am not meeting my responsibilities to you I expect you to let me know. In short, let's make our classroom a comfortable space for real intellectual dialogue, where everyone has the opportunity to contribute.

Learning Outcomes

Students in this class will demonstrate:

- the ability to describe the historical context in which Islamic societies have shaped global developments.
- the ability to describe how religious and political forces influence social behavior.
- the ability to describe the significant influence of Islam on global history.
- an understanding of political and economic forces shaped social change in Islamic societies.
- the ability to describe the social, political, and economic forces that influence social behavior.

Course Schedule and Assignments

Introduction

Aug. 23 (T) The History of “Islam” or History of the “Middle East”?

Aug. 25 (Th) Pre-Islamic Arabia

Robinson: Intro; pgs. 1-6

Part I: The Formation of Classical Islam

The Life of the Prophet, the Qu'ran and the spread of a New World Religion

Aug. 30 (T) Readings

Robinson 6-22

T-Sq.

Selections from the Qur'an

The Constitution of Medina

Sept. 1 (Th) Readings

T-Sq

The Pact of Umar
Accounts of the Arab Conquest of Egypt
Al-Tabari, The Killing of Husayn
Reaction Paper #1 due

Revolution and Restructuring: The Abbasid Caliphate

Sept. 6 (T) Readings

Robinson: 22-31.

T-sq:

Kennedy: The Harem; Abbasid Court Culture

Sept. 8 (Th) Readings

T-SQ

Al-Masu'di, *Muruj al-Dhahab* (The Book of Golden Meadows)
Ibn Miskawih : The Experience of Nations

Forms of Order: Law and Religious Authority

Sept. 13 (T) Readings

T-Sq :

Kamali: "Law and Society"
Sahih Bukhari, selections

Sept. 15 (Th) Readings

T-Sq

Market Regulations in Muslim Spain

Forms of Authorization and Submission: Knowledge and Faith

Sept. 20 (T) Readings

Robinson: 208-239

T-Sq

Cook: Ibn Qutayba and the Monkeys

Sept. 22 (Th) Readings

T-SQ

al-Ghazali, 'Attar

Forms of Expression: Art and Architecture

Sept. 27 (T) Readings

Robinson: 250-263

T-Sq

Priscilla Soucek, "The Theory and Practice of Portraiture in the Persian Tradition,"

Islamic architecture weblinks

Sept. 29 (Th) Readings

T-Sq

Kennedy: 112-159

Al-Jahiz, Excerpts from the Arabian Nights

Reaction paper #2

Forms of Social Ordering: Sex, Gender and Sexuality

Oct. 4 (T) Readings

Robinson 186-197

"Contraception and the Rights of Women"

"Hermaphrodites in Medieval Islamic Law"

Oct. 6 (Th) Readings

T-Sq:

"Homosexuality in Islamic Law"

Additional TBA

Reaction Paper #3

The Great Coffee Debate

Oct. 11 (T) Readings

T-Sq: Coffee and Coffee Houses

Oct. 13 (Th) Film: An Islamic History of Europe

Oct. 18 (T) Fall Recess

Oct. 20 (Th): Midterm

Part II: The Consolidation of an Islamic Civilization in the Middle East

Imperial de-centering: Fatimids and Turks

Oct. 25 (T) Readings

Robinson, Chapter 2, pp. 32-42

Oct.27 (Th) Readings

T-Sq:

Nizam al-Mulk

Kai Kaus: The Purchase of Slaves

Crusaders and Mongols

Nov. 1 (T) Readings: *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes*

[read in whole but focus on pp. xiii-55, 82-96, and 176-217]

Nov. 3 (Th) Film: Kingdom of Heaven

Nov. 8 (T) Finish Film + discussion

Reaction Paper #4

Nov. 10 (Th): Readings

T-Sq

Ibn Athir on the Mongols

Commerce, Travel and Urban Life

Nov. 15 (T) Readings

Robinson: 164-173

T-sq

Selections from *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*

Nov. 17 (Th) Readings

T-Sq:

The Travel of Ibn Batuta

Reaction Paper #5

Nov. 22 (T) TBA

Nov. 27 (Th) Thanksgiving Break

A New Imperial Synthesis: Mamluks, Timurids, and Ottomans

Nov. 29 (T) Readings

Robinson, Chapter 2, pp. 49-60 and Chapter 8, pp. 263-274

Dec. 1 (Th) Readings

T-Sq:

Ibn Khaldun

The Past in the Present

Dec. 6 (T) Discussion: In an Antique Land

Book Report Due

Dec. 8 (Th) Wrap up discussion: Was There Such Thing as an Islamic Civilization?

Final Exam: Dec. 15 11:30 to 2:30