

History of Islamic Societies to 1500

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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 Barnes and Noble)

- Jonathan Berkey: *The Formation of Islam*
- Amin Maalouf: *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes*
- Maria Rosa Menocal: *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain*

Supplementary materials:

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

Area E Approved Learning Outcome:

- Student will demonstrate the ability to describe the social, political, and economic forces that influence social behavior.

Explain how the course satisfies the Area E approved learning outcome:

To demonstrate that they have met the Area E learning outcome, students will be able to describe the evolution of Islam as both a religion and a socio-political framework for empire, **compare** the various Islamic dynasties and **analyze** the extent to which Islam incorporated existing elements into a new framework

Course Learning Outcomes:

- Students will **describe** the emergence, development and spread of Islam to 1500.
- Students will **compare and contrast** the forms of rule Islamic dynasties instituted as it spread over time and space
- Students will **identify** how socio-cultural and economic forces shaped life in Islamic polities.
- Students will **analyze** the ways in which Islamic societies incorporated various non-Muslim groups.
- Students will **evaluate** whether, given its vast scope and diversity, we can identify a singular "Islamic Civilization"

Grading

- Participation: 25%
 - Attendance, preparation for discussion, coffee debate and other misc. in-class activities
- Midterm: 30%
- Final: 30%
- Class Notes Wiki 15%

Grading Scale

A	90-100
B	80-89
C	70-79
D	60-69
F	59 and below

Note: I do not round up grades, so don't ask

Course Policies and Procedures

Attendance Policy

You are allowed two unexcused absence. After that 10 percentage points will be subtracted from your attendance grade [ie: 1 excused grade will be a 90%, two excused grades will be an 80% etc.]. Absences for serious, significant personal reasons or for participating in official institute activities will be excused as long as they conform to the guidelines laid out by the Dean of Student's office here: <https://studentlife.gatech.edu/content/class-attendance>

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 .

Learning Accommodations

If you have learning needs that require some adaptations for you to succeed in this course, please contact the Office of Disability Services on campus (<http://disabilityservices.gatech.edu/>). I am happy to arrange to accommodate your learning needs based on their recommendations.

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.

Course Schedule and Assignments

Introduction

Aug. 21 (T) The History of “Islam” or History of the “Middle East”?

Aug. 23 (Th) Pre-Islamic Arabia

Berkey, Intro, Chap. 3-4

Part I: The Emergence of Islam, 600-750

Aug. 29 (T) Muḥammad’s Message and Community: Qur’ ān and Umma

Berkey, Chap. 5-7

T-Sq.

Selections from the Qur’an

The Constitution of Medina

Aug. 31 (Th) The Early Conquests

Berkey: Chap. 8-10

T-Sq

The Pact of Umar

Accounts of the Arab Conquest of Egypt

Patricia Crone: Jihad: Idea and History

Sept. 5 (T) The Ummayyad Caliphate and the Origins of Sectarianism

T-Sq

Al-Mawardi: On Choosing a Caliph

Al-Hilli: On the Shi’ite Imamat

III. The Consolidation of Islam, 750-1000

Sept. 7&12 (Th&T) Revolution and Restructuring: The Abbasid Caliphate

Berkey: Chap. 11-14

T-Sq

ibn Burd: An Anti-Arab Lampoon

Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī: On the superiority of the Arabs

Sept. 14 (Th) Law and the Formation of Orthodoxy

Berkey: Chap. 15

T-Sq

Market Regulations in Muslim Spain

Sept. 19 (T) Class cancelled

Sept. 21 (Th) Law and Society: The Great Coffee Debate

T-sq: Coffee and Coffee Houses

Sept. 26 (T) Scholars and Philosophers

T-sq: Dallal, “Science, Medicine and Technology

Sept. 28 (Th) Sufism

Berkey, Chap 16-17

Oct. 3 (T) Muslims and Others: The Journey of Ibn Fadlan

T-sq: *The Rihla of Ibn Fadlan*

Oct. 5 (Th) Social Ordering: Sex, Gender and Sexuality

T-Sq

“Homosexuality in Islamic Law

“Contraception and the Rights of Women”

Oct. 10 (T) Fall Recess: Class Cancelled

Oct. 12 (Th) Midterm

Oct. 17 (T) Architecture and the Visual Arts

T-Sq

Priscilla Soucek “The Theory and Practice of Portraiture in the Persian Tradition”

Oct. 19 (Th): Literature

T-Sq

Al-Jahiz, Excerpts from the Arabian Nights

Part IV: The Islamic Roots of Europe: Muslim Spain [Reading TBA]

Oct. 24 (T) A historical overview of al-Andalus

Oct. 26 (Th) Cultural Synthesis

Oct. 31 (T) Convivencia: Fact or Fiction?

Nov. 2 (Th) The “Other” 1492: the Fall of Granada and its Legacies

Part V: The Transformation: Islam in the Middle Period, 1000-1500

Nov. 7&9 (T&Th) Imperial de-centering: Fatimids and Turks

Berkey: Chap. 18-25

T-Sq:

Nizam al-Mulk

Kai Kaus: The Purchase of Slaves

Nov. 14 (T): Mongols and Crusaders

T-Sq

Fazlullah: The Mongol Conquest of Baghdad

al-Maqrizi: The Bubonic Plague in Syria and Egypt

Nov. 16 (Th) The Crusades Through Arab Eyes

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

Nov. 21 (T) Film: The Kingdom of Heaven

Nov. 23 (Th) Thanksgiving Break

Nov. 28 (T) Commerce, Travel and Urban Life

T-sq

Selections from *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*

Additional TBA

Nov. 30 (Th) A New Imperial Synthesis: Mamluks, Timurids, and Ottomans

Readings

T-Sq:

Ibn Khaldun

Dec. 5 (T) Wrap Up

Berkey: Chap. 26

Final Exam: Dec. 7 2:50-5:40