In this course, Islam will be considered as a religion, culture, and civilization. The society of Shi'i Muslims in particular will be the focus of the course. During the last 200 years of Western study of Islam, Shi'ism has been neglected. It is only since the Islamic Revolution in Iran 1978-79 that Shi'ism received attention. Now with American forces in Iraq, Shi'ism is suddenly one of the main topics of interest for the news media. The Shi'is of Iraq are the majority -- some 60% -- of the population. But historically, Shi'is have been deprived of power in the government and of access to the political and economic life of the country. The most holy places of the Shi'is -- Karbala and Najaf -- are located south of Baghdad.

The image above is from the front page of The New York Times of October 7, 2003. It shows a silhouette of a woman wearing a black veil against the wasteland of the Iraqi desert. The only possession that she carries is a walking stick. No provisions, no clothing. She may be at least 100 miles from home and a long way from her destination: the tomb shrine of the grandson of the Prophet -- Hussein, the martyr of Karbala. Since the official defeat of Saddam Hussein, thousands of pilgrims like this woman, have crossed daily into Iraq from Iran. The American soldiers are awe-stricken by the tenacity and endurance of these pilgrims, who suffer dehydration and malnutrition and the constant threat of landmines, but, nevertheless, continue on their quest.

There will be two examinations: a midterm and a final.
Each student is expected to visit the Islamic Galleries at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, (200 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn), or the Metropolitan Museum of Art (5th Avenue @ 82nd) and to write a short essay about the visit. The essay may be descriptive or impressionistic.

Course Materials: Three books: Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair, Islam, A Thousand Years of Faith and Power, hereinafter referred to as Bloom/Blair; Roy Mottahedeh, The Mantle of the Prophet, hereinafter referred to as Mottahedeh, (This is a novel set against the background of Islam. Every week we will read one chapter. Each Monday, there will be a 15 minute class discussion on the assigned chapter and each student must write a response paper of no longer than one page summarizing his or her impressions of that week’s chapter); and Peter Chelkowski and Hamid Dabashi, Staging a Revolution: The Art of Persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran, hereinafter referred to as Chelkowski/Dabashi, (This is a very expensive book, but I, as an author, have arranged a 50% discount at the NYU bookstore. It is not available at a reduced price anywhere else). The books are to be found at the NYU bookstore.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Wednesday, September 8  Course Introduction

Monday, September 13  Mottahedeh: Chapter 1 and Note to the Reader and Prologue, pp. 7-37.

Wednesday, September 15 The World at the Rise of Islam and Muhammad and the Revelation of Islam; Bloom/Blair: Chapters 1&2, also a Note on Terminology and Introduction, pp. 7-33

Monday, September 20  Mottahedeh: 2, pp. 38-68

Wednesday, September 22 The Sources of Faith and Muhammad's Successors; Bloom/Blair, Chapters 3 & 4, pp. 35-63

Monday, September 27  Mottahedeh, Chapter 3, pp. 69-109
Wednesday, September 29  The Spread of Islamic Power; Bloom/Blair Chapter 5, pp.65-75

Monday, October 4  The Story of Layla and Majnun: The Sufi Quest; PHOTOCOPY.

Wednesday, October 6  Concert of Sufi Music

Monday, October 11  Mottahedeh, Chapter 4; pp. 110-133

Wednesday, October 13  The Crucible; Bloom/Blair, Chapter 6; pp. 78-102

Monday, October 18  Mottahedeh, Chapter 5; pp. 134-185

Wednesday, October 20  City and Country; Bloom/Blair, Chapter 7; pp. 103-117

Monday, October 25  MIDTERM EXAMINATION

Wednesday, October 27  The Flowering of Intellectual Life; Bloom/Blair, Chapter 8, pp. 119-155

Monday, November 1  Mottahedeh, Chapter 6; pp.186-247

Wednesday, November 3  Regional Powers; Bloom/Blair, Chapter 9; pp. 158-180

Monday, November 8  Mottahedeh, Chapter 7 & 8; pp. 248-336

Wednesday, November 10  Consolidation; Bloom/Blair, Chapter 10; pp. 181-219

Monday, November 15  Mottahedeh, Chapter 9 & 10 and Epilogue pp. 337-390

Wednesday, November 17  Expansion& Epilogue; Bloom/Blair, Chapter 11; pp. 221-239
Monday, November 22  Staging a Shi'i Revolution; Chelkowski/Dabashi, PLEASE BRING THE BOOK TO CLASS.

Wednesday, November 24  Shi'i Rituals and Popular Beliefs; Chelkowski/Dabashi, PLEASE BRING THE BOOK TO CLASS

Monday, November 29  Shi'ism, Politics, and War; Chelkowski/Dabashi, PLEASE BRING THE BOOK TO CLASS;

Wednesday, December 1  Play Reading: The Ta'ziyeh of the Martyrdom of the Luminous Leader of the Bani Hashim, Hazrat Abu'l Fazl Al-Abbas PHOTOCOPY

Monday, December 6  The Shi'i Holy Places and the Shi'is of Iraq

Wednesday, December 8  From Iran via India to the Caribbean Basin Photocopy

Monday, December 13  Course Review

Final Examination: Date to be announced