World Cultures: Islamic Societies
V55.0502.001-MW-12:30-1:45PM
Instructor: Peter Chelkowski
Room 714 Main/Silver Building
Fall 2005

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.

An Iranian pilgrim heads for the holy city of Karbala in Iraq after crossing the border illegally.

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.
Course Materials: Three books and one copy package: 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 week, there will be a group discussion with preceptors on the assigned chapter and each student must write a response paper no longer than one page summarizing his or her impressions of that week's chapter); 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 huge 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. In addition to the books, there is a reproduced selection of topics under the title, *World Culture: Islamic Societies*, hereinafter referred to as "CP," to be obtained at Advanced Copy Center, 552 LaGuardia Place (between West 3rd and Bleecker Streets).

**CLASS SCHEDULE**

**Wednesday, September 7**  
Course Introduction

**Monday, September 12**  
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.

**Wednesday, September 14**  

**Monday, September 19**  

**Wednesday, September 21**  
Muhammad's Successors: Bloom/Blair: Chapter 4; CP: "The Arab Kingdom" in Bernard Lewis', *Arabs in History*. Mottahedeh, Chapter 2, pp. 38-68.
Monday, September 26  

Wednesday, September 28  

Monday, October 3  
CP: Nezami's "Layla and Majnun;" "The Sufi Quest" in Peter Chelkowski's, Mirror of the Invisible World.

Wednesday, October 5  
Concert of Sufi Music. Mottahedeh, Chapter 4, pp. 110-133.

Monday, October 10  
NO CLASS – COLUMBUS DAY

Wednesday, October 12  

Monday, October 17  

Wednesday, October 19  
City and Country. Bloom/Blair, Chapter 7, Mottahedeh, Chapter 6, pp. 186-247.

Monday, October 24  

Wednesday, October 26  
MID-TERM EXAMINATION

Monday, October 31  
Wednesday, November 2  
CP: Emilio Garcia Gomez: "Moorish Spain."  
Mottahedeh, Chapter 7, pp. 248-268.

Monday, November 7  
CP: Norman Itzkowitz: "The Ottoman Empire."

Wednesday, November 9  
CP: Roger Savory: "Land of the Lion and the Sun."  
Mottahedeh, Chapters 8-9, pp. 269-356.

Monday, November 14  
CP: S.A.A. Rizvi: "Muslim India."

Wednesday, November 16  
Consolidation and Expansion. Bloom/Blair,  
Chapters 10-11. Mottahedeh, Chapter 10 and  
Epilogue, pp. 357-390.

Monday, November 21  
Staging a Shi’i Revolution. Chelkowski/Dabashi,  
PLEASE BRING THE BOOK TO CLASS.

Wednesday, November 23  
Shi’i Rituals and Popular Beliefs.  
Chelkowski/Dabashi, PLEASE BRING THE  
BOOK TO CLASS.

Monday, November 28  
Shi’ism, Politics, and War. Chelkowski/Dabashi, PLEASE  
BRING THE BOOK TO CLASS

Wednesday, November 30  
The Impact of the Iranian Revolution on Islamic  
Fundamentalism. Chelkowski/Dabashi, PLEASE  
BRING THE BOOK TO CLASS

Monday, December 5  
From Iran via India to the Caribbean Basin. CP:  
F. Korom and P. Chelkowksi: "Community  
Process and the Performance of Muharram  
Observances in Trinidad."

Wednesday, December 7  
"Divorce Iranian Style": a video presentation (a  
written review of this video is optional).
Monday, December 12  "Divorce Iranian Style": a video presentation (a written review of this video is optional). CP: al-Bukhari's "Sahih" on wedlock

Wednesday, December 14  Course Review

Final Examination: Date to be announced