MAP-UA 500 Cultures & Contexts: Islam and Judaism: Intertwined Histories.

Time: Mon-Wed 11:00-12:15
Location: TISCH Room: UC50
Professor Zvi Ben-Dor Benite
Office: KJCC #517
Phone: 8-8614
Email: zvi@nyu.edu
Office Hours: Friday 9:00-10:00

Recitations Instructors:

1. Dr. Andrea Cooper, adc299@nyu.edu
2. Mr. Ahmad Diab, ad1538@nyu.edu
3. Mr. Arta Khakpour, ak2091@nyu.edu

Islam and Judaism: Intertwined Histories.

Course Description and Learning Objectives

This course focuses on the way that two monotheistic religions, each based on the idea of divine law, have evolved through constant dialogues, exchange, imitation, friction, and conflict. The course involves a great deal of comparison and discussion of similarities and differences. Despite this, it is not comparative in nature and its purpose is certainly not to argue that Islam and Judaism are the “same.” Our approach to the material will be multidisciplinary throughout—we will read and discuss texts, look at visual materials, listen to music, and will also explore social and political aspects of Jewish-Muslim relations in history inasmuch as they are related to the topic at hand. We will think about how Jewish and Muslim communal life, practices, and politics converged and diverged. We will also read Jewish and Islamic texts such as (selections from) the Qur’an and the Hebrew Bible, the Hadith and the Talmud. We will explore legal documents and see how law has developed in both religions. We will also read some medieval poetry and philosophical treatises written by Jewish and Muslim philosophers. We will read Jewish and Islamic mystical texts and explore the affinities and connections between Sufism and Kabbalah. Will listen to music and look at art, craftwork, and architecture will explore the relationships, connections, mutual influences, conflicts, and frictions between Jewish and Muslim artists and musicians. Our purpose will not be to present Jews and Muslims as living harmoniously with one another but rather to
understand how interactions between the groups shaped the development of their religions in key moments in history up to the contemporary period.

Course materials:

We will use the following books:


Reuven Firestone: An Introduction to Islam for Jews.

Otherwise, all course materials, including book chapters, articles, primary sources, audio and visual materials, will be available online on the course website.

Primary sources for the recitation sections, all posted online, are identified by their titles only since you do not have look for them elsewhere.

Optional readings are identified with an asterisk (*).

Structure of Course, Grades, and Grading Policy

The first part of the course is more “thematic” and preparatory in nature, introducing the keys issues pertaining to Islam and Judaism: Prophecy, Monotheism, Scripture and Law. The rest of the course proceeds and develops as a mix of thematically and chronologically organized topics. Few of the lectures are almost exclusively “historical” or “chronological” in nature—for instance, the “Golden Age” of Jews and Muslims in Medieval Spain. Other lectures are more “thematic” but will still revolve around a more specific time span—for instance rationalist philosophy and philosophers. The lectures introduce a topic in a more general manner, and the recitations will be dedicated to close readings and discussion of primary source material in translation. In many cases readings include many short primary sources that discuss the same theme; students will be encouraged to compare them. In the recitations we will spend a great deal of time dissecting these sources and students are encouraged to write their papers on the basis of the recitation sections.
The teachers of this course expect all students to come prepared for class and to read the weekly assignments. Attendance and active participation is most recommended during general lecture times and is mandatory in the smaller Recitation Sections. Each Student will prepare five “responses,” presenting and discussing the primary sources. Response papers are to be about 4-5 pp. in length (double-spaced, normal font), well written, well argued, coherent and related to the weekly topics. They will be graded on an A-F scale. The best four will count towards the final grade. In order to receive a passing grade, all assignments must be completed on time. The times of submission will be decided within recitation section by the teaching assistants.

Grades Key:

Participation (in recitation sections and in the general class): 20%
Response Papers: 50%
Final Exam: 30%

Simple Course Policies:

Attendance is mandatory. You are required to attend both lectures and recitation sections.

The Students are strongly encouraged to participate in classroom discussion (both in lectures in recitations). One must do so, however, in a way that respects fellow students and instructors, and with no tediousness (that is to say, without dominating discussion or interrupting or intimidating others).

Class preparation (reading and writing): You must read assignments before lectures and recitation sections. Occasionally, I will call on one of the students to warm the class up by answering a basic question pertaining to the relevant reading. Papers must be handed in on time, unless a prior extension has been given. They must conform to the Style Sheet Guidelines available online. All projects must be submitted in order to earn a final grade. No late papers are accepted! Do not plagiarize! Do your own work, and be redeemed.

Use of computers in the classroom will be allowed during the first two weeks of the course. The number of students using computers for purposes other than learning during class will determine how we proceed with this policy.

See also the Morse Academic Plan Statement on Academic Integrity.
Withdrawal from Class

The NYU administration has set deadlines for withdrawal from any course. These dates and times are published in the semester’s course catalog and are not negotiable. It is the student’s responsibility to handle withdrawal requirements from any class. In other words, I cannot drop or withdraw any student. You must do the proper paperwork yourself so as to ensure that you will not receive a final grade of "F" in a course if you choose not to attend the class once you are enrolled.

Schedule of Lectures, Topics, and Readings:

Week One: Wednesday Sept 4th

Introduction: The Intertwined world of religions. Islam and Judaism in contemporary and macro-historical perspectives.

Readings:


Begin reading the Short Introductions.

Week 2: September 9th-11th
Nomadism and the image of Abraham.

Readings:

Finish reading the *Short Introductions*.

Firestone, chapters 2, and 10.

For the recitation sections:

Genesis 11, 15.
Qur'an, Sura 37.

“In the Beginning”/”The Qur'an on Creation”/”Paradise Lost”

------------------------------------------------------------------------

**Week Three: September 16th-18th**

**Genealogies and nations—Abraham**

Readings:

Firestone, chapter 3.


*Bat-Sheva Garsiel, “The Quran’s Depiction of Abraham in Light of the Hebrew Bible and Midrash,” in *The Convergence of Judaism and Islam*, pp. 45-64 (Online).*

For the recitation sections:

“The story of Abraham”/”The birth of Ishmael”/”Ishmael and the Ishmaelites”/ the Arabs as Ishmaelites”/ “The binding of Isaac”

------------------------------------------------------------------------

**Week Four September 23rd-25th**
Prophecy, Prophets, and Scriptures

Monday September 23rd:

Guest Lecture “Muhammad and Prophecy” Professor Reza Aslan.

All Students are Invited to attend Professor Aslan’s Public lecture that evening.

Readings:

Firestone, chapters 6-7, and 15.

For the recitation sections:

Exodus, chapters 4-5.

“The Inspiration of Prophetic Traditions”/ “Transmission of the prophetic traditions” “A Muslim history of prophecy.”

---------------------------------------------------------------

Week Five: September 30th-October 2nd


Readings:
Firestone: Chapters 16-17.

For the Recitations:

“Crimes and their penalties in the Torah”/ “Crimes and their penalties in the Qur’an”
“The dietary laws”/ “The core on and the Prophets on dietary laws”

---------------------------------------------------------------

Week Six: October 7th-9th:

Muhammad and the Jews
Readings:

Firestone, Chapters 5, 18.


*. H. Lazarus-Yafeh, “Muslim Bible Exegesis: the prediction of Mohammad and Islam,” in Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism, 75-110. (Online)

*. Abraham Geiger, "What has Mohammed taken from Judaism, in Geiger, Judaism and Islam. (Online)

For the Recitations:

Selected verses from the Qura’n, Suras: 2, 5, 19, 62, 105,

“Muhammad’s First Jewish Convert”/”The Pact of ‘Umar”/”The Affair of the Banu Qainuqa”/”The Extermination of the Quraiza”.

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Week Seven: (No Classes on Monday) Wednesday October 16th

Jews Under Early Islam


Mark Cohen, Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages, chap. 4.

For the Recitations:

“Jews aid the Arabs in the Conquest of Hebron”/’Umar Permits the Jews to Return to Jerusalem”/”Pact of ‘Umar”.
Week Nine: October 21st-23rd

The Abbasid Caliphate and the Codification of Hadith and the Editing of the Talmud


For the Recitations:

Selections from Rabbi Sa’ad Ga’on: The book of beliefs and opinions.

Week Ten: October 28th-30th

Al-Andalus (Muslim Spain) and its Arts, Poetry, and Music

Guest Lecturer: Professor David Wacks, University of Oregon.


For the Recitations:

Abu Ayyub Sulaiman Ibn Yahya Ibn Jabirul (Rabbi Shlomo Ibn Gabirol), and Rabbi Yehuda Ha-levy, Selected Love Poems.

For Music: there will a selection of tubes of Andalusian music on the course’ website.

Week Eleven: November 4th-6th

Politics and Polemics

Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, “Muslim Arguments Against the Bible,” in Intertwined Worlds, pp. 19-49; 143-160.

Harvey James, “A Jew amongst Christians and Muslims: introspection in Solomon ibn Adret’s response to ibn Hazm.”

“Appointment of the First Nagid n Tunisia”
“A synagogue accused of Being in Violation of Islamic Law is Vindicated in Court”
“Maimonides Epistle to the Jews of Yemen”
“Retort to Muslim Traditions Concerning Jews and the Bible”

For the Recitations:

Three Eleventh-Century Andalusi-Muslim Views of Ismaıl ibn Naghrila (Rabbi, Samuel the Nagid).


Selections from “Samuel Marchitano, Ifham al-Yahud”

-----------------------------------------------

Week Twelve: November 11th-13th

Philosophy and Philosophers
Film: Award-winning documentary “Out of Cordoba: Averroes and Maimonides in Their Time and Ours.”


For the Recitations:


Solomon ibn Gabirol and Shem Tov b. Joseph Falquera, Excerpts from “The Source of Life”

Discussion on the film will be in the recitations’ sections.
Week Thirteen:

Monday: November 18th: Film, Documentary “Out of Cordoba: Averroes and Maimonides in Their Time and Ours.”


Readings:


For the Recitations:

‘Ibn Arabi: Selections from The Meccan Revelations. (Online)

Rabbi Chayyim Vital, Selections from The Tree of Life. (Online)

Week Fourteen: November 25th-27th

Safed and Jerusalem: Music and Poetry in the Early Modern and modern Period


Efrat E. Aviv, “Estos Makames Alegres” (These Cheerful Maccams)—External

For the Recitations:

Music. TBA.

---

**Week Fifteen: December 2nd-4th**

**Our Times: Divergence, Conflict, and Rediscovery**

Readings:

S.D. Goitein, *Jews and Arabs: Their Contacts Through the Ages*, pp. 33-36, 212-225. (Online)
B. Lewis, “The End of Tradition,” in *The Jews of Islam*. (Online)


For the Recitations:


---

**Week 16: December 9th-11**

December 9th: Film “Le chat du Rabbin.” By Joan Sfarr. (French with English Subtitles).
Final class: Class discussion: American “Judeo-Christianity” and Islam Today.

Readings:

Mark Cohen, Crescent and Cross, pp. 3-14.