

College Core Curriculum  
CORE-UA502

## **Cultures and Contexts: Islamic Societies**

### **Medieval Islamic History and Culture**

Spring 2015  
Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:00-3:15, Silver 520

Professor Everett Rowson  
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Kevorkian Building, 50 Washington Square South, third floor, room 304  
Office hours Wednesdays 2-4 and by appointment

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This course will explore various aspects of the Islamic world from about the year 600 to about 1500. It postulates that despite very large variations in culture across time and space it is meaningful to speak of a single Islamic civilization during this period, and will ask why. This is not a religious studies course, although the dominance of the religion of Islam, in one way or another, serves to define and unify the societies under examination, and religion will be a major topic of study. But attention will also be paid to philosophy and science, literature and music, art and architecture, all within a roughly chronological frame. The majority of the assigned reading will be English translations of Arabic works written by the inhabitants of this world themselves.

One of the chief objectives of the course will be to help students appreciate just how different a culture different from their own—and especially one in the distant past—can be, and yet make perfect sense to its participants. By reading, analyzing, and discussing what those participants have to say about a myriad of topics they should gain insights into how cultures in general, including their own, work. Although the modern world is not included in the course, study of the Islamic past will also enhance students' understanding of Islam and Islamic cultures today.

One book, available at the NYU Bookstore, is required for purchase for this course:

Ira M. Lapidus, *Islamic Societies to the Nineteenth Century: A Global History*

This book, together with the lectures, will provide the essential historical scaffolding for the other assigned readings, which will be from primary sources (that is, modern English translations of works written in Arabic in the medieval period).

During the first half of the course the weekly primary readings will be taken mostly from the following book:

Eric Schroeder, *Muhammad's People: An Anthology of Muslim Civilization* (originally published in 1955)

This book describes itself as “a mosaic translation,” and is made up entirely of translated Arabic texts, arranged both chronologically and topically. It is unfortunately out of print, but the weekly readings from it, as well as from other sources through the second half of the course, will be available on NYU Classes.

### **Course requirements and grading**

#### **Attendance** at both lectures and recitation, **and active participation** in recitation **(15% of grade)**

There will be an attendance sheet to be initialed at lectures. Passivity at recitation will be problematical. More than two absences from lecture or more than two from recitation will result in a one-letter grade reduction.

#### **Four Response Papers (20%)**

Three-page essays discussing a particular section of the primary readings will be due on Mondays four times in the course of the semester. The specific assignment for each will be specified in lecture the Tuesday before it is due. Submission is to be made through NYU Classes to your Graduate Student Teacher. Late submission will be subject to a grade reduction and will be possible only until Wednesday section meetings.

#### **Paper on visit to the Metropolitan Museum of Art (10%)**

Each student will be required to visit the Islamic galleries at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and then submit a six-page essay dealing with some aspect of what has been observed. (More specific instructions will be available later in the semester.)

#### **Midterm Examination (20%)**

In class, March 12, with both objective and essay components, as well as a map quiz.

#### **Final Examination (35%)**

Tuesday, May 19, 2:00-3:50 pm. No make-ups permitted for either the mid-term or the final except in cases of dire necessity.

All cell phones must be turned *off* at both lectures and recitations. No eating or drinking (except water) is permitted in either venue. Note-taking on computers is permitted, but indulging in other electronic activities, such as checking email, texting, or web surfing, is extremely rude and will not be tolerated.

Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated and will result in a grade of F (at least).

## Schedule of Lectures and Readings

This schedule is subject to modifications, any of which will be posted on NYU Classes (as will be all readings other than Lapidus).

### Week

1. 1/27, 29     Introductory; pre-Islamic background (non-Arab and Arab)  
                  Imru' al-Qays, *Mu'allaqa* (poem), trans. Suzanne Stetkevych  
                  Lapidus, 1-38
  2. 2/3, 5        Muhammad, Islam, Qur'ān  
                  Lapidus, 39-54  
                  Daniel W. Brown, *A New Introduction to Islam*, 49-87  
                  *Qur'ān*, trans. A. J. Droge, *sūras* 2, 98-114  
                  Norman Calder *et al.*, *Classical Islam*, interpretations of *sūra* 98 by  
                  al-Ṭabarī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī
  3. 2/10, 12     Arab conquests and Rightly-Guided Caliphs  
                  Lapidus, 55-79  
                  Schroeder, xiii-xviii, 145-202  
                  **Response Paper due February 9**
  4. 2/17, 19     Umayyads; early piety and *hadith*  
                  Lapidus, 80-90, 114-125  
                  Schroeder, 203-263  
                  Brown, 122-126
  5. 2/24, 26     'Abbāsids  
                  Lapidus, 91-113, 126-140  
                  Schroeder, 263-356  
                  **Response Paper due February 23**
  6. 3/3, 5        Law and Theology  
                  Lapidus, 141-173  
                  Brown, 149-171  
                  Schroeder, 357-381 and 567-580
  7. 3/10, 12     Philosophy and Science  
                  Lapidus, 293-301  
                  Brown, 174-192  
                  **Midterm Examination March 12**
- Spring Recess
8. 3/24, 26     Tenth and eleventh centuries; Shī'a

Lapidus, 174-180, 211-221,  
Lenn Evan Goodman, trans., *The Case of the Animals versus Man  
before the King of the Jinn* (selection)

9. 3,31/ 4.2 Sufism; interaction of religious currents; al-Ghazali  
Brown, 193-216  
Schroeder 521-554  
al-Ghazali, *Deliverance from Error*, in William H. McNeill and  
Marilyn Waldman, *The Islamic World*, 206-239

**Response Paper due March 30**

10. 4/7, 9 Court culture; literature  
Schroeder, 611-644, 691-704  
Robert Irwin, *Nights & Horses & the Desert: An Anthology of  
Classical Arabic Literature*, 148-193

11. 4/14, 16 Personal status: non-Muslims; gender and sexuality; slavery  
Lapidus, 181-210, 264-292  
al-Jahiz, "Boasting Match over Maids and Youths," in *Nine Essays  
of al-Jahiz*, trans. William M. Hutchins, 139-166  
A. F. L. Beeston, trans., *The Epistle on Singing-Girls of Jahiz*, 12-38

**Response Paper due April 13**

12. 4/21, 23 Art and architecture; Islamic Spain  
Robert Irwin, *Islamic Art in Context*, 57-102  
Lapidus, 369-405

13. 4/28, 30 Twelfth and thirteenth centuries; Crusades; Black Death  
Lapidus, 225-263, 302-329  
Usama ibn Munqidh, *The Book of Contemplation*, trans.  
Paul Cobb (selection)

**Metropolitan Museum Response Paper due April 27**

14. 5/5,7 Fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; Mongols, Mamluks, and Ottomans  
Lapidus, 427-467

**Final Examination Tuesday May 19, 2:00-3:50 pm**