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:


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)
   Lapidus, 1-38

2. **2/3, 5** Muhammad, Islam, Qur’ān
   Lapidus, 39-54
   Daniel W. Brown, *A New Introduction to Islam*, 49-87
   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

**Response Paper due March 30**

10. 4/7, 9 Court culture; literature
Schroeder, 611-644, 691-704

11. 4/14, 16 Personal status: non-Muslims; gender and sexuality; slavery
Lapidus, 181-210, 264-292

**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

**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**