SPRING 2018 CORE-UA 502
Cultures and Contexts: Islamic Societies
Marion Katz

Course description: Since the rise of Islam in the seventh century CE, Islamic thought has both been shaped by unfolding events and contributed to the interpretation of those events. This course looks at how dramatic occurrences such as wars and invasions, as well as broader and more gradual social changes, evoked reflection on the levels of Islamic theology, law, and mysticism. In response to Muslim communities' changing experiences across time, Muslim theologians, jurists, and Sufis pondered the religious implications of conflicts among co-religionists, of military victory and defeat, of economic prosperity and deprivation, and of the changing social and political relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims. In pondering the nature and boundaries of an ideal Islamic society, they often also re-narrated and re-interpreted events from the past. Starting with the rise of Islam and ending in the post-9/11 US, we will examine examples of the diverse ways in which Muslim thinkers have responded to the challenges of politics and history. On the way, we will encounter the viewpoints and interpretations of Muslims who are diverse in ethnicity, sect and gender. In seeking to make sense of the many contrasting perspectives on Islamic history and identity, we will return repeatedly to the fundamental question, "What is Islam/ic?"

Course objectives: By concentrating on primary texts dating from the historical periods in question, you will be asked to imagine and explore the views and assumptions of people very distant from your own social and historical context (whether or not you yourself are Muslim), and how these views and assumptions informed how they understood the events of the Islamic past and of their own day. Through secondary reading assignments and lectures, we will also examine how modern scholars strive to reconstruct and understand the views of the past, and what assumptions, methods and agendas underlie differences of historical interpretation. Through these inquiries, you will learn how to deconstruct simplistic narratives about Islam and its history and think critically about how such narratives function.

Course requirements: The most fundamental requirement of the course is that you attend each class, having done the required readings. Weekly recitations are an integral part of the course, offering opportunities for deeper engagement with your fellow students and deeper inquiry into our textual sources than the large lectures. Absences will adversely affect the participation component of your final grade, and you may be liable to automatic failing grade in the course for more than three absences from lecture and/or recitation. Written assignments will include four essays and a midterm (in class) and final examination (held on the day designated by the Registrar).
Calculation of final grade:

40% (10% each) essays
20% midterm exam
20% final exam
20% Class attendance and participation in recitations, as evaluated by recitation instructor

Course schedule:

Session 1: Introduction
Reading: Shahab Ahmed, What Is Islam?, pp. 5-26

Session 2: Pre-Islamic Arabia: Islam's Other

Session 3: Life of Prophet Muhammad
“The Life and Work of the Prophet,” from F.E. Peters, A Reader on Classical Islam, pp. 42-98

Session 4: The “Rightly Guided” caliphs

Session 5: The civil wars and the boundaries of the community
Reading: Berkey, pp. 83-90; The Epistle of Salim ibn Dhakwan, trans. Patricia Crone and Fritz Zimmermann, pp. 75-99, 115-127 (odd-numbered pages only)
Short essay (3 pages): According to the Epistle of Salim ibn Dhakwan, what theological problems were raised by the political conflicts among the early Muslims? What relationship do you think the author may have had with the rulers of his time, and why?

Session 6: The Umayyad dynasty
Kennedy, Caliphate, ch. 2; Rippin, Classical Islam, pp. 130-137

Session 7: Ruling an empire
Lapidus, History of Islamic Societies, ch. 3; Berkey, pp. 91-101; Abū Yūsuf, Kitāb al-Kharāj (Taxation in Islam), trans. A. Ben Shemesh, pp. 68-93

Session 8: The ‘Abbasid dynasty
Kennedy, Caliphate, ch. 3; Ibn al-Muqaffa’, Kalila wa-Dimna, trans. Wyndham Knatchbull, pp. 65-82
Session 9: Contesting religious authority
Short essay (4 pages): Based on the readings by al-Tabari and Ibn al-Jawzi, what were the sources of the religious authority of the caliph al-Ma’mun? Of Ahmad ibn Hanbal? What do you think is really at stake in this conflict?

Session 10: Imami and Ismaili Shi’ism

Session 11: Caliphs and Sultans
Kennedy, Caliphate, ch. 5-6; Nizam al-Mulk, The Book of Government, trans. Hubert Drake, pp. 9-33, 62-65

Session 12: The crystallization of Sufism
Reading: Berkey, Formation of Islam, pp. 152-158, 184-188; Mohammad Ebn-e Monavvar, Secrets of God’s Mystical Oneness, trans. John O’Kane, pp. 75-131

Session 13: Midterm exam (in class)

Session 14: Responding to the Crusades
Lapidus, History of Islamic Societies, pp. 283-294; Francesco Gabrieli, Arab Historians of the Crusades, pp. 87-125

Session 15: Responses to the Mongol conquests

Session 16:
Spain and the convivencia debate

Session 17: Berber dynasties in Spain and North Africa
Short essay (4 pages): According to Ibn Khaldun, what makes a social order legitimate and strong? How does his interpretation diverge from the narratives of earlier Islamic history that
we’ve encountered so far? How are Ibn Khaldun’s theories informed by the social and political developments in his lifetime?

Session 18: The Ottoman empire: Islamic law in the service of the state
Kennedy, ch. 10; Berkey, pp.261-269; Colin Imber, “Ebu’s-Su’ud (d. 982/1574),” in *Islamic Legal Thought*, ed. David S. Powers et al, pp. 401-414

Session 19: The Mughals: Another way of imagining (and remembering) Islamic rule
Reading: Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, pp. 115-131; Satish Chandra, “Akbar in Modern Indian Historiography,” in *State, Society, and Culture in Indian History*, pp. 71-84

Session 20: Interpreting 18th- and 19th- century revival and reform

Session 21: Overview: What Is Islamic?
Assignment: Visit the gallery “Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia and Later South Asia” at the Metropolitan Museum. Write an essay (5 pages) responding to the following questions: Do the objects gathered in this gallery all have something in common, and if so, is Islam as a religion? Why or why not? Would you have made the same choices in terms of the places and historical periods represented in a gallery of Islamic art?

Session 22: 19th-century responses to colonialism

Session 23: Pan-Islamism

Session 24: Religious responses to the abolition of the caliphate

Session 25: The Muslim Brotherhood and the idea of the Islamic state
Short essay (four pages): Based on his commentary on these passages of the Qur’an, how do you think Sayyid Qutb envisions the central drama of Islamic history? What are the main
actors and conflicts? How does his vision contrast with those we’ve encountered so far, and how does it reflect his historical and political context?

Session 26: The Iranian revolution

Session 27: Islam in an age of media
Reading: Ehab Galal, “Yusuf al-Qaraḍāwī and the New Islamic TV,” in Gräf and Skovgaard-Petersen, eds., *Global Mufti*, pp. 149-180; European Council for Fatwa and Research, Fatwa on permissibility of home-ownership mortgages

Session 28: In the wake of 9/11
Reading: Asma Afsaruddin, *Contemporary Issues in Islam*, pp. 141-171; Fatwa on the permissibility of participation of Muslim military personnel in the US armed forces

Session 29: Islamic responses to environmental change