

History 205
The Making of the Islamic World: The Middle East 500-1500
Mr. Chamberlain
Fall, 2014
TTh, 4:00—5:15
1217 Humanities

Office Hours, Fridays, 4:00-5:00 and by appointment, just email me.

Office: 4111 Humanities

265-2673

mchamber4@me.com

mchamber@wisc.edu

Important Dates

Oct 2: Map Quiz

Oct 30: Midterm

Nov 25: Papers Due

Dec 20: Final 4:00 sharp: last minute to turn in the take-home final exam. You may turn it in earlier. You should not take this course if there is the slightest possibility that you will not finish on time.

Attendance at each lecture is mandatory. If you have a competing obligation please let me know.

History 205 covers a 750-year period stretching from Morocco to Central Asia. The period and place are so large, and the peoples concerned so diverse, as to beg the question how we might possibly do any of it justice in fifteen. Moreover, we will not concentrate on a single aspect of the region's historical experience, politics or religion say, but at a larger and to my mind more important issue: the interconnections of everything on which evidence has survived that played a role in large-scale historical change. These will include the region's physical environment, human ecology, politics, social life culture, economy, technology, and religion, all of which we will be studying in some detail. By not giving precedence to any one of these, but by looking for their connections and interactions over time, I hope to show you how one of the world's great civilizations came into being and developed over time. In so doing so we will be giving an extended answer to the question above.

The course starts where all historical inquiry begins: with how the peoples we are studying have adapted to their physical environments. This will require giving some consideration to the environment itself, both its distinctive features and how it might be compared to the environmental settings of the other agrarian civilizations of the pre-modern past. We will then examine how the region's

peoples adapted to it as farmers, peasants, nomads, and city-dwellers, again trying to understand context through comparison. From there we move to something that appeared in the region before anywhere else, and that like the environment gave it its historical unity: the agrarian empire. We will then be in a position to approach a set of recorded history's greatest developments: the appearance of Islam, the Arab conquests, and the formation of an Islamic empire and Islamic civilization. The remainder of the course will be devoted to an examination of Islamic civilization as it developed in the aftermath of the breakup of the early Islamic empire. In this section we will give considerable attention to institutions that survived until the early-modern period and some, in altered form, to recent times. Please note that this is not a course that puts religion at the center, though of course we will be studying the central ideas and practices of Islam throughout. Think of it instead as an attempt to understand how environment, economy, politics, culture, social life, and religion interacted over time to produce and sustain a civilization.

Grading is based on a map quiz (10%), mid-term (30%), paper (30%) and final (30%). If you want an A be prepared to put a consistently high level of effort into the course. Note that the final is a take-home. You may appeal a grade by giving me the paper or exam with a written argument why it should be changed, then scheduling a meeting about it. Be aware that your grade can be revised down as well as up.

Warnings, threats, and menaces:

This course is listed as a 3-4 credit course. All undergraduates should register for four credits, with the exception of those who are running up against a credit limit. All students must write a paper and attend all lectures. The lectures and the readings each cover material not covered in the other. You are responsible for both.

If you are prevented from attending a lecture, please send me an email.

The field of medieval Islamic history is not so well established as to permit the last -minute scanning of a bluffer's guide before an exam. Not only does such a book not exist, the field has yet to benefit from a comprehensive textbook. The only way to acquire a decent knowledge of the field is pull together disparate materials from textbooks, translated primary sources, and stuff that your instructor has stumbled upon and that he might remember in lecture. The only way to organize and synthesize this material is to come to lecture and to read. The usual scams, dodges, last-second stratagems, and trusty expedients do not seem to work. So keep up.

You will have noticed that the course schedule is unbalanced, the heaviest reading at the beginning and the midterm, paper, and final all falling in November

and December. There is a reason for this: the subject is unfamiliar to most of you, and I want to give you the chance to synthesize before you begin to put your thoughts on paper. This places a special responsibility on you. Do not flag, procrastinate, postpone, or go easy on yourself the first six weeks of the course.

Finally, take care with resources on the web. The course home page will have a list of relatively reliable links, but you must check them out and cite them diligently. Not-too-bad sources for other fields, Wikipedia for example, are often flat wrong when it comes to Islamic history. You would do the world a service were you to correct it as you go along.

Oh, and by the way, I've heard though can hardly believe that some faculty have advanced their personal political views in their classes. Standing offer: I'll give an A to anyone who succeeds in figuring out my views on any current hot issue. If you are wrong, sorry, this is a pay-for-play proposal, I'll have to shave a half-point off your final grade. Don't want to turn this into twenty questions.

Textbooks (available in cheap used copies at Amazon and elsewhere. I always invite students to ask for help if difficulties arise, but for the last five years none have. Offer still stands though).

Michael Cook, The Qur'an: a Very Short Introduction.

Robert Irwin, Night and Horses and the Desert: an Anthology of Classical Arabic Literature.

Albert Hourani, A History of the Arab Peoples.

We will also read scholarship and translated primary sources posted on the course home-page located at learn@uw. Make sure you take a look soon. '

The course blog will also be essential reading, particularly for papers (you'll find the suggested topics there) and exam prep (including the questions, in advance).

Lectures and Readings

Weeks 1 and 2: Course description, Human geography: peasants, city-people, nomads; early states and empires; trade.

Reading:, Prologue; Irwin, 1-29; "Ibn Khaldun " readings on learn@uw. I'll put a copy of the Irwin chapter there until your textbooks arrive.

Week 3: Arabia and the Arabs in Late Antiquity; life of the Prophet Muhammad; the Qur'ân.

Reading: Hourani, 7-22; Cook, Koran; Irwin 30-41; Ibn Ishaq, Biography of the Prophet, selections” (learn@uw, and note: read this over the next two weeks as required readings slacken)

Week 4: The Arab conquests and the formation of an Islamic empire.

Reading: Hourani, 22-38; Irwin, 42-67, Kennedy reading on learn@uw.

Week 5: Cult, ritual, basic doctrines of Islam; map- quiz on the 4th.

Reading; Hourani, 38-75 (for overview only, we will cover this material in detail later) and 147-158, Selections of hadith on learn@uw. Peter’s translation on the Hajj.

Week 6:

From Umayyads to `Abbasids. The `Abbâsid Empire and the formation of an Islamic cultural style; literature, architecture; translation from Greek to Arabic.

Reading: Irwin, 68-147 (read Irwin over the next two weeks) “Baghdad and Provinces, Lewis translation (learn@uw); “Poets, scholars, physicians, Lewis translation” (learn@uw).

Week 7: Religion and communal life: Sunnis and Shi`a; Christians and Jews; conversion.

Reading: Hourani; “Status of non-Muslims, Lewis translation” (learn@uw), selections from Sermons of `Ali

Week 8: Economy and trade; the collapse of the `Abbasid Empire; selections (short) or translated sources on learn@uw.

Week 9: Review and midterm

Week 10: Scholars, soldiers, and sultans: Islamic cultural, social, and political institutions of the Middle Period

Reading: Hourani, 83-141; “Law, `ulama’, Lewis translation” (learn@uw)

Week 11: The era of invasions: Turks, Crusaders, and Mongols; the “military patronage state”.

Reading: McNeill and Waldman, 185-206; 249-272 (learn@uw); Irwin, 314- 448.

Week 12: Islamic Law and Sufism, education, Sufis, the `ulama, and the ties that bound.

Reading: Hourani, 158-208; Selections (short) on learn @uw.

Thanksgiving: Nov. 24

Week 13: The medieval social and political order

Reading: Chamberlain, "Military patronage states and the political economy of the frontier." (learn@uw)

Weeks 14, 15: The Middle East and Europe to 1500.

Reading: "Cook, Brief History of the Human Race, 2" (short selection on learn@uw)

Last day: Summary and Review

Papers

Using Cook, Irwin, and learn@uw, address one of the following questions. There will be lengthy discussion of sources in class and on the course blog.

1. How did Islam challenge the world view, notions of the meaning of existence, and sense of personal morality of the pre-Islamic Arabs? What would have seemed strikingly new to pastoral Arabs in the Qur'an?
2. How did the early chroniclers, especially al-Tabari, depict the issue of religion in the shift from the `Abbasid revolt to the reorganization of the `Abbasid state? This is a hard one, best consult with us early and often.
3. How did the arts – literature and architecture in particular – both reflect and attempt to shape the transformation of Arab and Muslim society from the conquests through the establishment of the `Abbasid empire? If you chose to do this question, take a look at Oleg Grabar's The Formation of Islamic Art (New Haven, 1973).
4. To what extent can the Arab conquests be said to have been a decisive break with the late antique past? Read M. Morony, Iraq after the Muslim conquest (Princeton, 1983) and Hugh Kennedy, "From polis to marina," available on JSTOR.