

Fall, 1993

History 851: Seminar in the social and cultural history of the high medieval Middle East, 1025-1516.

Mr. Chamberlain

265-2673 (office)

233-3065 (home before (9:00 PM).

Office hours: 12:00 Tuesdays and Thursdays, and by appointment.

This seminar examines both examines and questions the possibility of the social and cultural history of the high medieval Middle East. The reason for the topic is four-fold: first, to read at the source the critique of "Orientalism" and to follow the ensuing debate; second, to examine the universalistic claims of the human sciences by looking at their application to societies distant in space and time; third, to see how the social sciences have changed the way scholars have studied the Middle East; and fourth to see how the field has developed over the last generation by reading both the classics and the cutting-edge literature. The second point of this seminar is to understand how and why scholars write books by criticizing them, as a way of learning to write your own.

For those of you with no background in medieval Islamic history, please read immediately Ira Lapidus, A History of Islamic Societies (Cambridge, 1988), 11-225 and/or Albert Hourani, A History of the Arab Peoples (Cambridge, MA, 1991), 7-205. I recommend highly that you all read Patricia Crone, Pre-Industrial Societies (Oxford, 1989). These books should be available in paperback in bookstores everywhere.

Each week you are responsible for reading all readings. The week before each session I will hand out a list of questions for discussion. Several people will then volunteer to open the discussion of each question with a short presentation. The point is to ferret out the underlying argument in the book and to put it into the larger context of the seminar.

You may choose one of two possibilities for your papers. The first option, most suitable for those who are doing a little medieval tourism, is to write three small (ten page) essays on narrow topics, focusing on the issues of particular sessions. The second, which I commend to anyone dealing with the medieval or early-modern periods, or interested the uses to which historians put the human sciences, is a thirty-page paper on a broader topic, for which you will read widely in the library. Do not be deceived by the apparently simpler demands of the first option. Reading less for three papers is more than compensated by the obligation to think out and present three separate arguments.

In all cases I expect you to try out your paper topics on me before you put weeks of effort into them. This is in order to save you time and intellectual investment if the topic is unworkable, and to get me involved in your projects at their conception. Also, I might be able to make a useful suggestion or two. When you come to discuss your topics with me, do not worry about seeking my approval or that you will be tried and hanged for nutty or vague ideas. Shalala gave the history department's torture-chamber and gallows to the university bureaucracy, and our quota of defenestrations has been reduced by the Quality Reinvestment Program. Your discussions with me should be collaborative ventures, and I hope only to make myself useful to you and your work.

Bernard Cohn, "History and Anthropology: the State of Play" in Comparative Studies in Society and History 22 (1980). 198-221.

Roy Mottahedeh, Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society (Princeton, 1981).

Week Nine: Post-Structuralism and the criticism of the Human Sciences.

Readings.

Selections from Bourdieu, Foucault, Certeau, La Capra, to be handed out.

Week Ten: Relations between culture and society: education and the `ulamâ'. part one.

Readings:

Humphreys, Islamic History, 187-208

George Makdisi, The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West (Edinburgh, 1981).

A.L. Tibawi, "Origin and Character of the Madrasa," in BSOAS, xxv (1962), 225-38.

Week Eleven: Education and the `ulamâ'. part two.

Readings:

Jonathan Berkey, The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo (Princeton, 1992).

Week Twelve (if we have time), Chamberlain, The Treasures of Knowledge: Culture and Society in the Medieval Middle East.

The remainder of the term will be devoted to pulling this material together (you not only have to read it, you have to remember it too!). We should have time for all participants to discuss their papers.