

History 225: The first Islamic empire

Fall, 2015

Mr. Chamberlain

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Office hours: Formally, 4:00-6:00 Fridays, though I'll be available most days of the week
—just get in touch by email.

The Arab conquests of the seventh-century CE are often treated as a decisive break in the history of the Middle East, one that divides study of the region into the firm categories of the “ancient” and “Islamic”. The Islamic empires that followed the conquests are usually treated more as Islamic than imperial developments. This class, asking how the Arab conquest of the East Roman and Persian empires resulted in a new universal empire, will question the notion of a clean break. Rather than taking the period immediately prior to the rise of Islam as our starting point, we will seek out long-term continuities in the history of the region. Our central problem will be the historical development of the universal cosmopolitan empire--the characteristic mode of political organization in the region from the third millennium BCE until the First World War, its aftermath with us today.

We will begin by asking how the region's physical environment and human adaptation to it shaped the development of its political organization. We then move on to an examination of the universal cosmopolitan agrarian empire in comparative context. The main part of the course looks at approaches to understanding the Arab conquests and the formation of an Islamic empire and high culture through the height of its power and the beginning of its fragmentation around 900 CE.

Lectures, papers, and exams will all be organized around questions, including:

--What did the early Islamic empire share with other pre-modern universal empires and what distinguishes such empires from other forms of political organization?

--How did the formation of ever-larger empires lead to ever more universal cultural fusions, even civilizations? How did such empires facilitate ever-more-global economies? How did they bring disparate intellectual and scientific traditions into contact with one another? How useful or accurate is approaching this period as a formative era in a larger story of globalization?

--In what respects can the Arab conquests be seen less as a departure from long-standing patterns than as a culmination of social, political, and cultural processes that had shaped the region for millennia?

--How can historians begin to compare and contrast such large and long-lived empires when the languages, archival practices, and literary and history-writing traditions are so

different? How can material evidence help us to understand long-term developments that are difficult to follow in documentary or literary evidence?

Requirements include a map quiz, midterm, take-home final, and 7-10 page paper.

Due dates:

Map quiz: Sep 29

Midterm: Oct 29

Paper: Nov 17

Take-home final: Dec 24. Please send it to me as a pdf with "Your Name, 225 Final" as the subject line of the email and title of the document.

Texts and sources: many of the readings for class and nearly all for your papers will be available on learn@uw, as will slideshows, presentations, lecture outlines, and suggested paper topics. A few years ago I stopped ordering textbooks through the bookstore, as they are often available used or in cheaper Kindle editions. You will not need textbooks for the first two weeks of the course. As this is the first time I've taught this subject in a lecture course it is likely I'll make some substitutions of the learn@uw weekly readings--you'll have plenty of warning.

Textbooks, available through Amazon or other outlets.

Hugh Kennedy, When Baghdad Ruled the Ancient World (Cambridge, MA, 2004).

Robert Hoyland, In God's Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire (Oxford University, 2014).

Tom Holland, In the Shadow of the Sword: the Birth of Islam and the Rise of the Global Arab Empire (New York, 2012).

Lecture schedule and readings. Please note that aside from the required textbooks chapters taken from books should be available on learn@uw; articles you can find through JSTOR via Memorial Library's web page.

Weeks 1 and 2: Introduction; environment and human ecology.

-Ibn Khaldun, al-Muqaddima, selections on learn@uw.

Weeks 2 and 3: The ancient universal cosmopolitan empires.

-Van De Mieroop, A history of the ancient Near East (Oxford, 2007), pp. 1-125.

-Spiro Kostoff, The city shaped: Urban patterns and meanings throughout history (London, 1991) pp. 29-41.

-Peter Green, From Alexander to Actium: the historical evolution of the hellenistic age, pp. 312-335

Week 4: The Near East in Late Antiquity

-Christopher Kelly, "Empire Building," in Bowersock et al., Late Antiquity: a Guide to the post-classical world," pp. 170-195.

-Garth Fowden, Empire to Commonwealth: consequences of monotheism in late antiquity, pp. 138-175.

Week 5: Arabia in Late Antiquity: the penetration of the late antique world into a tribal, mostly stateless, and in large part pagan world.

-Jonathan Berkey, The Formation of Islam: religion and society in the Near East, 600-1800, chap. 3, "Arabia before Islam".

-Start reading Tom Holland, In the shadow of the sword.

Week 6: Prophecy and state-building in late antique Arabia.

-Tom Holland, In the shadow of the sword.

Week 6: The Arab conquests and the formation of an Arab/Muslim state

-Hugh Kennedy, "Islam," in Bowersock et al., 217-237.

-Donner, "The Arab conquests", on learn@uw

-Morony, "The Nature of Continuity," Iraq, 507-526.

-Start reading Robert Hoyland, In God's Path.

Week 7 and 8: The formation of the Islamic "conquest state"

-Finish Hoyland and start Kennedy, When Baghdad ruled the world.

Week 9: Change and continuity in post-conquest Iraq.

-Michael Monony, Iraq after the Muslim conquest (Princeton, 1984), selections on learn@uw.

Week 10: From the ancient to the "Islamic" city

-H. Kennedy, "From Polis to Madina - Urban Change in Late Antique and Early Islamic Syria", Past and Present 106 (1986)

-Spiro Kostoff, The city shaped: Urban patterns and meanings throughout history (London, 1991) pp. 159-189

Week 11: Art, architecture, and urban form as sources for the history of empire

-Grabar, selections from The Formation of Islamic art and The Dome of the Rock

Week 12: Baghdad, center of the world and culmination of trends towards universal empire.

-Kennedy, When Baghdad ruled the ancient world

-Jacob Lassner, The shaping of Abbasid rule, and The Topography of Baghdad in the early Middle Ages, selections on learn@uw.

Week 13: The transmission of knowledge and the history of ideas.

-Dimitri Gutas, Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbāsīd Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th Centuries) (1998).

-F.E. Peters, Allah's commonwealth, selections.

Week 14: The making of orthodoxy and the codification of Islamic legal and doctrinal traditions.

-Selections from Bukhari's Sahih and other sources from the period.

Week 15: The unraveling of the Abbasid Empire in the tenth-century.

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Map Quiz Terms

Modern States

Afghanistan
Algeria
Bahrain
Egypt
Iran
Iraq
Israel
Kuwait
Lebanon
Libya
Morocco
Oman
Pakistan
Qatar
Saudi Arabia
Sudan
Tunisia
Turkey
United Arab Emirates
Yemen

Land Masses and
Regions

Anatolia
Arabian Peninsula
Armenia
Balkans
Fars
Hijaz
Iberian Peninsula
Iranian Plateau
Iraq
Mesopotamia
Khorasan
Kurdistan
Lower Egypt - Nile
Delta
Maghreb
Sudan
Syria

Transoxania
Turkestan
Upper Egypt
Yemen

Mountain Ranges

Atlas
Caucasus
Elborz
Lebanon
Pyrenees
Taurus
Zagros

Deserts

Dasht-i Kavir
Nufud
al-Rub` al-Khali (Empty
Quarter)
Sahara

Cities

Aleppo
Alexandria
Aswan
Baghdad
Basra
Beirut
Cairo (Fustat)
Cordoba
Damascus
Fez
Grenada
Hamadan
Herat
Isfahan
Istanbul
(Constantinople)
Jedda
Jerusalem
Kufa
Luxor
Mecca
Medina
Mosul

Najaf
Nishapur
Qayrawan
Riyadh
Samarra
Samarqand
Shiraz
Tikrit
Tehran
Tunis

Bodies of Water

Aegean
Arabian Sea
Arabian/ Islamic
Persian Gulf
Aral Sea
Black Sea
Caspian Sea
Gulf of Oman
Indian Ocean
Mediterranean
Red Sea

Rivers

Diyala
Euphrates
Indus
Jaxartes (Syr - Darya)
Jordan
Karun
Nile
Oxus (Amu - Darya)
Tigris
Volga

Straits and Waterways

Suez Canal
Straits of Hormuz
Bab al-Mandab
Bosphorus
Dardanelles
Gibraltar

