INTRODUCTION TO THE MIDDLE EAST
Monday & Wednesday, 2:00-3:30, Williams 029

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Office Hours: by appt.

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Course Description:
This course surveys the history of the Middle East from the rise of Islam (c. 600) to the modern era, concentrating on political, social, and cultural trends. Although the emphasis will be on Middle Eastern societies, we will occasionally consider developments in other parts of the world, such as sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia, and Spain, where Middle Eastern cultures are or have been influential. Our goal is to understand the shared features that have distinguished Middle Eastern societies under the aegis of Islamic civilization, as well as the varieties of experience that have endowed the region with so much cultural diversity. We will bring our study up to the present in order to understand the political and social strains that are affecting the Middle East today.

Course Objectives: Students will obtain a broad knowledge of the course of Middle Eastern history. Students will also gain a general appreciation of the diversity of social practices that fall under the term “Islamic civilization.” Finally, students will learn at least two fundamental skills of historical inquiry: the analysis of primary sources (in translation), and the evaluation and critique of secondary scholarship. Occasionally, fun may be had.

This syllabus is subject to change at any time. It is your responsibility to adapt to any such changes.

Required Readings:


Reserve Readings, Assignments, and Exams will be posted on Blackboard unless you are notified otherwise.

Course Requirements:
Attendance of lectures and participation in recitations. Chronic (more than two) unexcused absences will be penalized. Recitation will revolve around your readings: you must bring your readings to class (discussion or no). Discussions will be informal, but I WILL be keeping track of who is talking and who is not, and in the quality of your contributions. Speak up! Worth at least 20% of final grade.
Take-home map assignment. Due in class at the beginning of Week 3. Must be passed by all students.
2 short (5-8 page, double-spaced, 12-point font, one-inch margins) writing assignments. See below. Each is worth 15% of the final grade.
Mid-term quiz-like-exam (take home). Worth 15% of the final grade. Due by the first class of Week 8.
A Museum Visit assignment (see below). Worth 15% of the final grade.
Take-home final exam. Due by the second day of Exam Week, 5 pm (electronic submission). Worth 20% of the grade.

All requirements must be completed satisfactorily before a final grade will be issued. Late work will be penalized by one full grade per day of lateness.

Writing Assignments:
1. (Due on the second class of Week 6): Write an essay addressing one of the following questions. Each question requires a careful reading of al-Zarnuji’s Instruction to the Student, a 13th-century treatise on education. A xerox of this text is available on reserve at the library and on Blackboard. For background and a helpful exposé of medieval Islamic education, you might wish to look at Jonathan Berkey, The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo, also on reserve. As usual, be sure to use citations to the text in footnotes or endnotes.
A. Did medieval Islamic education involve more than simply the passing on of information from one generation to another?
B. Was medieval Islamic education characterized more by formal institutions or by personal relationships between student and teacher?

One note about the Zarnuji text: the word sometimes translated as “science” in the text is the Arabic word ‘ilm, which more properly refers to “knowledge,” especially knowledge relating to religious law (the shari’a) and its related subjects, such as Qur’an commentary, grammar, hadith, etc.

As an additional option for this assignment, if you prefer to write an essay based on your reading of another medieval Islamic primary source (perhaps one excerpted in your packet), you may do so: but I will have to authorize your topic.

2. (Due on the last day of class): Compare the experiences of the narrator of The Committee with the life-stories in Burke & Yaghoubian of Dr. Naji (187-202), Ghada (319-338), and
Nasir (301-318). Write an essay that answers one of the following questions. As usual, be sure to use citations to the text in footnotes or endnotes:

A. What do these life-experiences, fictional or otherwise, reveal about the process of state-building in the Arab world?

B. What do these life experiences, fictional or otherwise, reveal about the plight of the individual in the modern Middle East?

**Museum Visit (Due on the first class of Week 11):**

Sometime between Spring Break and the beginning of **Week 11**, you must visit the Islamic Gallery of the University’s Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology (http://www.museum.upenn.edu/). I will be making one group visit at some point in the semester (not during class-time), but you do not need to go with me if your schedule does not permit it.

After perusing the gallery, write a short (5 page maximum) response to **one** of the following questions; in doing so, you must provide at least **two (2)** specific examples from among the object on display in the gallery as evidence of your claims:

1. What do these objects, architectural fragments, and/or design motifs convey about the ideals about nature presumably embraced by the Islamic cultures that produced them?

2. What do these objects, architectural fragments, and/or design motifs convey about the ideals about domestic life presumably embraced by the elite, urban Islamic cultures that produced them?

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**Schedule**

**WEEK 1: INTRODUCTIONS**

**WEEK 2: HISTORY, BACKWARDS: THE LAST 100 YEARS**

A. The story so far

B. A post-Ottoman world
   Readings: Burke & Yaghoubian, 187-202

**WEEK 3: ISLAMIC ORIGINS**

A. The grip of Antiquity
   Readings: Lapidus, 3-17

**MAP QUIZ DUE**
B. The career of Muhammad  
Readings: Lapidus, 18-30

**WEEK 4: THE AGE OF CALIPHS**

A. The conquest state  
Readings: Lapidus, 31-54

B. ‘Abbasid imperium  
Readings: Lapidus, 56-80; 103-111

**WEEK 5: TRANSFORMATIONS: SUCCESSOR-STATES**

A. Provincial courts (Ghaznavids & Hamdanids)  
Readings: Lapidus, 112-132

B. Caliphal rivals (Egypt & Spain)  
Readings: Lapidus, 283-290; 309-319

**WEEK 6: TRANSFORMATIONS: THE SELJUK TOOLKIT**

A. The sultans and Sunnism  
Readings: Lapidus, 133-146; 290-294

B. Ayyubids & Crusaders  
Readings: Waines, 63-102  
**ASSIGNMENT #1 DUE**

**WEEK 7: SHARI'A AND THE PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE**

A. Law & Jurisprudence

B. The transmission of knowledge  
Readings: Waines, 33-59 (and photos that follow)

**WEEK 8: SHI'ISM & SECTARIANISM**

A. Alternatives to Sunnism  
Readings: Waines, 103-132

B. Shi‘ism  
Readings: Waines, 155-172  
**MIDTERM EXAM (Take-home)**

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**BREAK-----------------------------------------------

**WEEK 9: SUFISM: ISLAMIC MYSTICISM**

A. Ascetic impulses  
Readings: Waines, 133-154
B. Mystical brotherhoods

WEEK 10: STRUCTURES OF SOCIETY

A. Muslims & non-Muslims

B. Popular culture

WEEK 11: MAMLUKS, MONGOLS, & TIMURIDS

A. The long (and miserable) fourteenth century  MUSEUM VISIT DUE
Readings: Lapidus, 226-234; 248-250

B. The Islamic “international” order
Readings: Waines, 175-202

WEEK 12: MODERN IRAN: SAFAVIDS & QAJARS

A. The return of the Shahs
Readings: Lapidus, 234-247; 469-476
Burke & Yaghoubian, 103-116

B. Modernity?
Readings: Lapidus, 476-488
Burke & Yaghoubian, 339-365

WEEK 13: THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

A. Origins
Readings: Lapidus, 248-275

B. “Decline” and reform
Readings: Lapidus, 275-282; 294-298; 489-501
Burke & Yaghoubian, 64-79

WEEK 14: THE ARAB WORLD

A. The Case of Egypt
Film: Umm Kulthum: A Voice Like Egypt
Readings: Lapidus, 512-534
Burke & Yaghoubian, 301-318

B. Arab States
Readings: Lapidus, 535-585
- probably not a bad idea to have read The Committee by now, too.

WEEK 15: CONCLUSIONS  ASSIGNMENT #2 DUE
A. The End? Contemporary Challenges
Readings: Lapidus, 453-468
Burke & Yaghoubian, 405-420