This course examines major historical transformations of the region we now call the 'Middle East' (from late antiquity through the eleventh century) in relation to the formation and development of the Islamic religious tradition and various Muslim empires. In particular, we will examine how the remarkably fast Arab-Muslim conquests—which expanded the early Muslim polity from its tiny desert origins in western Arabia to a vast empire that stretched all the way from Iberia/Spain to the Indian subcontinent in merely decades—radically changed the political and cultural map of the known world, and how this affected the lives of the region’s various communities. The course is therefore about (1) large historical transformations and how to think about them on a grand, macro-scale, but also (2) how to make sense of their consequences for historical subjects (ethnic groups, religious communities, families, persons). In other words, in addition to learning about the careers of caliphs and empires, we will also think about peasants experimenting with new crops; long-distance Jewish merchants in the Indian Ocean (and what happens to their wives when they don’t return after years of absence); the choices before Christian bishops considering whether and how to translate the Gospels into Arabic and what that does to these texts (and their own authority); the careers of military slaves who rise to become sultans; singing slave-girls in the Arabian Nights and in real palace halls, as well as Muslim women scholars and the important role some of them played as patrons of urban institutions. In so doing, we will cover various themes like scholastic discussions of the Prophet’s birthday and God’s attributes; Muslim jurists’ considerations of birth control, but also Cairene Jewish schoolchildren’s exercise books and medieval tales about fabulous beasts in far-off islands.

Starting Week 3, the course will take the following general structure (see Table, pp. 4-5):

- **Monday** lectures will be devoted to a chronological survey of historical events in chronological order (labeled A): here we mostly trace the main political and imperial developments;
- **Wednesday** lectures cover detailed thematic explorations of specific historical institutions, practices, or topics (primarily social and cultural) in the medieval Middle East/Islamic tradition (labeled B).
- In your **Friday sections** with TAs, you will be discussing assigned primary sources (all in English translation), most of them related to ‘B’/thematic topics.

Accordingly, we will identify lectures thus: 3b. = Muhammad in Mecca… = week 3, Wednesday lecture.

While the course emphasizes social and political history, it is also intended to develop students’ wider critical skills. Through close readings of primary sources, students will not only learn from these medieval texts, they will also be encouraged to think about wider questions about historical interpretation and the social uses of the past: we will discuss the often contested nature of many historical ‘facts’ and the political stakes of history (i.e. why people get animated and inflamed by narratives of the past).

Our geographic focus is the area we now call the Middle East (and we will briefly discuss the origins and history of the term), i.e. the central Arab World and Iran. With the exception of a few forays on particular topics, we will therefore not cover (Islam in) North or sub-Saharan Africa, Andalusia (Islamic Iberia), the Indian subcontinent, or Southeast Asia. Our main temporal ‘bookends’ are (i) ca. 600 A.D. (the region in Late Antiquity, just before the birth of Muhammad), and (ii) end of the 11th century (i.e. we stop after the first Crusade). In the Timeline Assignment (p. 2), we discuss what

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**Course Outline** (Spring 2018)

Lectures: Mon. & Wed. 12:00-12:50 PM (Shaffer 304)
Sections: Fridays 11AM and 12PM

**Prof. Tamer el-Leithy** (tamer.elleithy@jhu.edu)
Office: 330F Gilman Hall
Office Hrs: Tues. 12:130 PM & by appointment
goes into these periodization *choices*—i.e. how historians choose the dates that appear on book jackets, course titles, etc.

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**Class Requirements & Grades**

Students are expected to attend *all lectures and sections*; prepare the readings and actively participate in class discussions. *Five unexcused absences result in an automatic F for the course.*

**Exams** There are none.

**Grades** will be assigned as follows:

- 20% Attendance and active participation (especially in Friday sections).
- 25% **Two Short-Response Essays**: Essays consist of a critique of a primary text or an essay response to a question; you will have a choice of answering one of two prompts. Your essay must cite and analyze at least two primary passages (from the assigned readings, your choice). Essay #1 should be ~2 pages (~600 words); Essay #2 will be ~4 pages (~1,200 words)—the former worth 10%, the latter 15% of the grade. Essays are due the Sundays before Week 5 & before Week 11, i.e. **Sunday 2/25** and **Sunday 4/8**, respectively (see Table overleaf). Essay prompts will be posted on the Blackboard on the Fridays before they are due (giving you 48 hours to complete each essay).
- 10% A **Timeline Exercise (small group assignment)**: Each small group of ~3 students will construct a timeline showing (i) important political developments (e.g. revolutions, dynasties, Bedouin incursions, etc.) vis-à-vis (ii) larger (and slower) socio-economic changes (e.g. the Agricultural Revolution; changes in Red Sea trade, etc.) on a single chart. More details on the BB; Timeline is due in Week 13.
- 20% A **Take-home Midterm Exam** consisting of short-essay questions. There will be a *choice*: students answer two out of four questions; each essay answering a question should be around two pages (~600 words). Questions posted on Blackboard: Friday 11th March; answers due **Sunday 13th March by 11pm**.
- 25% The **Take-home Final Exam** has a similar format to the midterm: this is scheduled right after our *last lecture* (i.e. before reading period and exams week). Students answer three out of six questions; each essay should be ~2 pages (~600 words). Questions posted on Blackboard: Friday 5/9 at noon; answers **due by noon on May 12th**.

**NB:** All student work to be submitted by **email only (no hard copies)**; send the message with attached file (see below on format) to both the professor and TA. With the exception of the final exam, all work is due on Sundays by 11pm—your email is your *timed receipt* for submission. *Late submissions (i.e. without a doctor’s note) are penalized: one grade ‘notch’ per day late (e.g. an essay drops from A to B if handed in two days late): no exceptions.*

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**Format (for all submitted written work):** Margins: 1” all around; double-space texts; font size 12 point. Students must submit all written work to their own recitation leaders as a MS Word or PDF file attached to an email (b/cc yourself: the time stamp on that email is your receipt and our confirmation regarding submission time/date; *either* file format: don’t send both!). The **first word in the filename** should be your last name; number all pages.
Readings

“Do not read superficially, lest you do me an injury, and derive no benefit for yourself. You must study thoroughly and read continually; for you will then find the solution of those important problems of religion, which are a source of anxiety to all intelligent men.” – Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed

“Context is one of the most important indications of the speaker's intended meaning. Overlooking context is likely to lead to misunderstanding [of any text] and false argumentation.”

ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, 14th-c. polymath (here on interpreting the Qur’an)

Pay heed to Maimonides (and if you don’t know who he is, please look him up!). You are responsible for completing all assigned reading—carefully, critically, and thoughtfully—before coming to class. Occasionally, I provide a few points or questions to guide you (e.g. what to look for in a text, or how it may differ from another), but you are responsible for asking your own active questions of the texts, rather than languishing in passive reading.

The themes covered in each lecture are outlined in the table overleaf (pages 4-5). A more detailed outline with the specific readings for each class will be posted on Blackboard. No books required; all readings will posted on the Blackboard (under Course Documents) as PDFs.

Writing

Plagiarism will result in an automatic F for the course. Keep all your notes and source material and be prepared to explain any writing you submit. In your response and exam essays, I am looking for indications that you have read and thoughtfully engaged the material—originally and critically. An essay is an argument; I need not agree with yours, but I expect it to address the issues raised in class and in the readings—and to be coherent and logically supported. I will discuss and provide more suggestions regarding essays later in the semester.

Primary Source Responses

Primary sources provide an example of the actual texture of medieval texts and their worlds—the context of their production and audience; the social realities they recount and reflect. The short-response essays are intended to provide a first-hand experience of the task of historical inquiry: how can we use a text to illuminate the cultural history of a social group or period?

Readings for 1B. (our next/first real class: Wednesday Jan. 31st)

1B.i. Marc Bloch, “The Idol of Origins…” My two-page selection from his Historian’s Craft (1953). Read it carefully—ideally a few times—and think about the relevance of his arguments. Who is this directed at? Can you think of examples of these fallacies around you (e.g. in US popular culture)? Why is it problematic—and what are the consequences of such errors in historical reasoning?

1B.ii. Alternative accounts of the same event (2 pages). Think about the differences between them: in what ways are they different? How do we account for the differences? Which is more ‘accurate’? why?

1B.iii. Short excerpts from a high-school textbook on history… Try to think of what it is, for and by whom, etc. What are your impressions about the text in general? We will discuss all three in Tuesday’s introductory lecture—as we think about the practice and politics of history; what historians do; why all this is important, i.e. what the stakes are in historical reconstruction and interpretation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week/ date</th>
<th>A. Mondays: Historical Chronology</th>
<th>B. Wednesdays: Themes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1 &lt;br&gt; Jan 29 &amp; 31</td>
<td><strong>Introduction (‘free ride’)</strong></td>
<td><strong>On Historical Inquiry</strong>&lt;br&gt; The Idol of Origins; Excerpt from a Textbook; Sojourner Truth: Two accounts of a 19th-c speech</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 2 &lt;br&gt; Feb. 5 &amp; 7</td>
<td><strong>The World of Late Antiquity I: The Byzantine and Sasanian Empires</strong></td>
<td><strong>Late Antiquity II: Pre-Islamic Arabia</strong>&lt;br&gt; Meccan Trade and Raiding; Tribal Society; Polytheism; Wine, Honor &amp; Verse</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 3 &lt;br&gt; Feb. 12 &amp; 14</td>
<td><strong>Muhammad in Mecca (~600-622 A.D.)</strong>&lt;br&gt; First Revelation; Persecution in Mecca; Emergence of a Believers Movement; First Migrations to Abyssinia</td>
<td><strong>Qur'an I: Revelation &amp; Scripture</strong>&lt;br&gt; History of Revelation; Collection into a Codex; The Qur'an as Object: Decoration, Handling, etc. An Attic in Yemen: Earliest Datable Qur'an Fragments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 4 &lt;br&gt; Feb. 19 &amp; 21</td>
<td><strong>Muhammad in Medina (622-632 A.D.)</strong>&lt;br&gt; The Hijra to Yathrib/Medina; The First Polity The Constitution of Medina; Muhammad enters Mecca victorious; Death of Prophet</td>
<td><strong>Qur'an II: Exegetical Moves</strong>&lt;br&gt; Exegesis [tafsir]; Satanic Verses (&amp; modern amnesia) How to Do Tricks with Texts &amp; Time: Constructing the 'Abbadi Past; Re-Organizing other Religions</td>
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**Essay 1**<br> Questions posted: Friday 2/23 <br> Essay 1 due: Sun. 2/25

| Week 5 <br> Feb. 26 & 28 | **Prophet’s Successors:** Four Caliphs (632-661 A.D.) Succession Crisis; Rasbidun (‘Rightly-Guided’ Caliphs) From Ridda (‘Apostasy’) Wars to Arab-Muslim Conquests; Garrison Towns | **The Prophet in Memory, Hadith, Law**<br> The Sira (Prophet's Biography); Hadith and Hadith Criticism; Ideas of Prophecy & Prophethood |
| Week 6 <br> Mar. 5 & 7 | **The Umayyads (661-750 A.D.)**<br> An Arab Kingdom: The First Divān [Treasury] Arabizing the Bureaucracy; Umayyad Coinage Reforms; The Dome of the Rock (Jerusalem) | **Producing/Managing Religious Difference**<br> Dhimmis: Non-Muslims under Muslim Rule (Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, Hindus...) The Pact of ‘Umar (a quasi-legal tradition) |

**Midterm**<br> Questions on BB: Friday 3/11 @ noon <br> Answers due: Sunday 3/13 by 5pm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 8</th>
<th><strong>Spring Break: No Meetings</strong></th>
<th><strong>March 19th &amp; 21st</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 9 &lt;br&gt; Mar. 26 &amp; 28</td>
<td><strong>‘Abbāsids II – The Shī‘ī Century and Political Fragmentation (945-1050 A.D.)</strong>&lt;br&gt; The Slave-Soldier Experiment: The mamluks&lt;br&gt; The Fatimids in North Africa&lt;br&gt; The Buyids in Baghdad</td>
<td><strong>History through Coins; ‘Abbāsids Economy</strong>&lt;br&gt;Come to class and examine coins from the 7th-8th centuries! The (Jewish) Khazars’ 8th-century Ironic Mint The Discovery of Paper—and its consequences The Medieval Green Revolution (10th c. onwards)</td>
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<td>Week 10 &lt;br&gt; April 2 &amp; 4</td>
<td><strong>The ‘Abbāsids III: The ‘Commonwealth’, or Successor States &amp; Rival Courts (11th-12th c.)</strong>&lt;br&gt; Persianate Courts in Iran &amp; Central Asia (and the scholars and texts they patronized)&lt;br&gt; Turks on the Asian Steppes: Enter Seljuks (very forcefully)! A Muslim Map centered on Kashgar, Central Asia</td>
<td><strong>Cairo Geniza [synagogue attic ‘archive’]</strong>&lt;br&gt;Schoolchildren’s exercises on recycled paper Merchants and Credit Networks Long-Distance Trade: Jewish Merchants in the Indian Ocean; Grass Widows; Charity Petitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week/ date</td>
<td><strong>A. Mondays: Historical Chronology</strong></td>
<td><strong>B. Wednesdays: Themes</strong></td>
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<td>Week 11 Apr. 9 &amp; 11</td>
<td>Changing Muslim-Christian Frontiers (11th c.) - Battle of Manzikert (1071): Seljuks vs. Byzantium - The Normans conquer Sicily (later 11th c.); the Arabic Diwan/Trilingual Chancery of the Normans - The 'reconquista' in medieval Iberia (11th-12th c.)</td>
<td>Conversion to Islam &amp; Islamization Islamization vs. Conversion to Islam Agent of Conversion Accounts of the Spread of Islam in Egypt; Java; China, and the Maldives</td>
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<td>Week 12 Apr. 16 &amp; 18</td>
<td>Franks in the Levant: The First Crusade (1095 A.D.) - Fall of Jerusalem to the Crusaders; Muslim Counter-Crusades - ‘Who are the rank, hairy brutes?’ Memoirs of Usama, Syrian Gentleman during the Crusades</td>
<td>Arabization/Acculturation Linguistic &amp; Religious Conversions (Iran vs. Egypt); Translating the Tradition: Arabizing Christianity Striking Tableaux: Christian Martyrs of Cordoba (9th c.) &amp; Coptic Martyrs of Cairo (14th c.)</td>
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**TIMELINE**

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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th><strong>Women, The Family, and Sexuality</strong></th>
<th><strong>Peoples, Places, Things (aka Names and Slurs)</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 13</td>
<td>Apr. 23 &amp; 25</td>
<td>Women as Scholars, Hadith Transmitters &amp; Patrons; Marriage, Divorce and Child Custody; Sexuality</td>
<td>Arab-Persian Rivalry: Shu'ubiyya Movement (9th c.) Ethnicity in the Middle Ages: The Noachian Frame; Language and Lineage; Geography and Travel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 14</td>
<td>Apr. 30 &amp; May 2</td>
<td>Cultures of the ‘Ulama’ II: Islamic Law &amp; Sufism - The Orthodox Schools of Islamic Law [Madhhab] - The Social Logic of the Fatwa (Legal Responsum) - Legal Acrobatics: Birth Control &amp; Coffee - Muslim Institutions: Madrassa [College]; Wāqf [Endowment] - Sufism: Early Asceticism; Development of Sufi Orders</td>
<td>Peoples, Places, Things II: Marvels/Wonder (= What’s the point of marvels (and science fiction)?) - Al-Biruni on Indian culture; Ibn Battuta in the Maldives - Awesome Wonder: Muslims on Pre-Islamic Past (the Egyptian pyramids; the Ellora temples in India) - The Fabled and Fabulous Islands of Wāq-Wāq</td>
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**FINAL EXAM**

- **Questions on BB:** Friday 5/9 @ noon
- **Answers due:** Monday 5/12 by noon

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