

Fall 2019
Mondays & Wednesdays 12:00-1:15 PM
Room: Gilman 10

Prof. Tamer el-Leithy (tamer.elleithy@jhu.edu)
Office: 330F Gilman Hall
Office Hours: Wednesdays 4-5:30 PM

AS 100.374 – *Conquest, Conversion, and Language Change in the Middle Ages*

Pre-modern empires were expansive: through military conquests, they regularly annexed (and lost) regions and resources, including their diverse human populations. These conquered communities were often culturally distinct—for empires ruled over diverse populations, with little expectation of, or desire for, cultural or ethnic homogeneity. Every conquest was thus a cultural encounter (albeit one informed by distinct power differences). The association of conquest and religious transformation intensified with the advent of monotheistic religions, especially the European-Christian and Islamic traditions, both of which developed salvific ideologies of holy war. As such, medieval and early-modern military conquests were often justified by reference to a religious mandate and conversion goals (‘spreading the word of God/the Truth’). In some cases, religious conversion was a direct consequence of the new rule (or interactions with new elites). Given the centrality of language (and sometimes script) ideology to medieval religious traditions—e.g. Latin/Spanish for Christianity; Arabic language for Islam, but also the spread of the Arabic script alone in southeast-Asia—linguistic conversion was sometimes part and parcel of religious transformation.

The Main Cases

This course examines selected cases of imperial expansion and the resulting cultural transformations, especially religious and linguistic conversion. Our primary focus will be the remarkably swift Arab-Muslim conquests (late-7th/early-8th century)—which, over a few decades, expanded the early Islamic polity into a large empire that stretched from southern France all the way to northern India—which initiated the eventual Arabization and Islamization of most of the region we now call the Middle East. The process was distinctly uneven; we will ask why Arabization take place before Islamization in some regions but not others—and about the relationship between these processes, for example, (a) in Iran, where Persians who converted relatively soon after the conquests, became *Persian Muslims*, soon making Persian the second language of Islam, versus (b) in Egypt, where Arabization was slow to commence, but unfolded well before widespread Islamization which only occurred much later (14th c.)? How did subsequent cultural and linguistic developments lead to the revival of Persian in the 11th century, and a centuries-long ‘era of Persian’ in Muslim courts from Iran to northern India?

Why is it that when the ‘French’-speaking Normans conquer Britain in the mid-11th century, *they* undergo acculturation and gradually adopt English as their official and everyday language? How does the transition from Latin to vernacular languages in Europe—a process that began around then, but which was not necessarily related to military conquest—compare? And how does the latter compare with a similar *and contemporary* regional shift in Indian high/court cultures from Sanskrit to India’s many regional languages? Why did the Normans in 12th-century Sicily issue royal documents in Arabic (often, multilingual charters including Greek, Latin, and Arabic)—right after they conquer the island from its earlier Muslim rulers?

In the mid-13th century, the Mongols rapidly conquered over half of the known world of Eurasia—toppling empires from China and Central Asia through the Muslim empires of the Middle

East (thus formally ending the 500-year career of the Abbasid Empire) to Eastern Europe. But in the wake of these astounding victories, the Mongols (like the Normans) acculturated to the religions, languages, and cultures of the conquered (thus, some 50 years after toppling the Abbasids, emperor Ghazan converts to Islam—and his Muslim successors continue to rule as Islamic sovereigns).



Some Questions we will ask

How is conquest remembered by the conquered—as a tragic defeat, with nostalgia for the bygone eras, or as a foundational event, an origin of the contemporary self? And how was it celebrated and commemorated by the conquerors? How do religious ideologies of conquest (e.g. the Christian *reconquista* and Crusades; Islamic jihad and *futuḥ* traditions) compare with other world-conquering imperial ideologies, eg. those of the early Mongols?

How do we conceptualize language change? Today, we often hear about how languages *die* every single day—a statistic that should (rightly) provoke contemplation and activism. But what about language change in the Middle Ages?

And how do we understand cultural change *across imperial borders*? How do the dynamics of cultural contact—‘borrowings’, appropriation, acculturation, translation—operate in material culture

“The Birth of Muhammad”, an unusual illustration from a Persian manuscript (14th-century, produced in Tabriz, Iran)



and art? Do such non-textual sources present a alternative picture of political power and cultural change than that provided by textual evidence? For example, how do we make sense of the incorporation of Hindu and Jain temple carvings in early Indian mosques? Similarly, how to understand a 14th-c. Coptic Bible codex that features the precise aesthetic conventions used in contemporary Qur'an manuscripts? Or a trilingual Psalter (Greek-Latin-Arabic) from medieval Sicily (*top right*)? Or the 14th-c. illustrated Persian miniature that 'translates' the Prophet Muhammad's birth into the iconographic conventions of the Christian Nativity (*below*)? Such cases of mobility, circulation, and cultural entanglement nuance our understanding of religious traditions (what makes something 'Muslim'? or 'Islamic?') and make us rethink models of cultural encounter and exchange.

Course organization

This course is a comparative investigation of a series of case-studies that we will treat in modules organized roughly by conquest case. Our temporal focus will be the Middle Ages, loosely defined: we begin with the Late-late-antique Arab Muslim conquests (7th-8th centuries) and conclude with cases from early-modern world (Spanish colonialism/Christianization; Ottoman conquests; non-conquest spread of Islam in SE Asia; 16th-17th centuries). More specifically, we will examine the cases under four main rubrics (one month each, roughly):

- The Arab-Muslim conquests and attendant Arabization and Islamization (7th-13th c.);
- The 'Vernacularization' Moment (11th c. onwards) in Europe and India
- Mongol Conquests and Acculturation
- The Early Modern Period (Spanish missionary conquests; Islam with conquest in SE Asia)

Course Requirements & Grades

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

Exams There are no in-class exams.

Grades will be assigned as follows:

30% **Attendance and active participation** (includes your presentations of articles and primary documents). Once again, this is a seminar and we will learn through an engaged discussion. This includes your degree of text preparation for each class and your presentations of assigned readings. Your presentation of secondary studies should be brief (~5 mins each):

- (a) summarize the contents of the work (without judgment!); identify the sources/genres used by the author; distill the argument of the work into one sentence;
- (b) discuss the work in relation to other scholarship we have read/are reading and situate it within larger historiographic trends; and
- (c) Conclude with your critique, in the form of questions for a general discussion.

In the case of a primary source, your introduction should give some background on the author, period, and genre. You should then pose some questions for class discussion. Do not summarize primary sources, except sections related to your discussion questions.

40% **Three Short Response Essays:** Each essay will respond to prompt/question; you will have a choice of answering one of two questions. Your essay must discuss (i.e. cite and analyze) at least two primary documents/passages (your choice from the assigned readings).

- Essay #1 should be ~3 pages (~900 words, assigned 10% of grade);
- Essay #2 ~4 pages (~1200 words, assigned 15% of grade), and
- Essay #3 ~5 pages (~1500 words, assigned 15% of grade).

Essays are due the Sunday before w5, w9 & w12, i.e. Sunday 9/29, 10/22, and 11/19, respectively (see Table). Essay Questions appear on the Blackboard the Friday before.

30% A **Final Research Paper (~15-20 pages)**; this portion of the grade covers various stages of preparing your research paper:

- Identify a topic and viable research question; to be submitted in week 9. I may also direct you to relevant sources;
- Submit paper title, abstract, and preliminary bibliography in week 12—and schedule a meeting with me to develop further.
- Final Product: substantial research paper (15-25 pages) is due by December 15th.

All student work to be submitted by email only (no hard copies); send the message with attached file (see below). Unexcused late submissions (e.g. 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.

Format (for all submitted written work): Margins: 1" all around; double-space texts; font size 12 point. Students must submit *all* written work to me 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!). First word in the filename should be your last name; number all pages.

Reading and Writing

“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* (Jewish philosopher, 13th-c. Egypt)

“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. Syrian Muslim polymath

“Generally speaking, when reading a short book, you will complain that it can be easily finished. Yet, when reading a long book, you will complain that it is hard to finish it. Reading a book of resentment, your hair will bristle with anger; while reading a joyful book, you will beat your spittoon until it is broken. [To strike a balance] whenever you read a book, you should have other books at hand as well.”

— Wu Congxian, late-Ming Chinese writer

Pay heed to these wise words when reading—and writing. 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.

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 Sources

Primary sources provide an example of the 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?

Conquest, Conversion, and Language Change — WEEKLY TOPICS

Week/date	MONDAY	WEDNESDAY
Week 0 Aug. 29th	—	<i>Introduction (free ride)</i>
Week 1 Sep. 2nd, 4th	<i>Labor Day: no class</i>	Critical Terms, Historical Inquiry
Week 2 Sep. 9 & 11	Early Islam and the Arab-Muslim Conquests (7th-8th c.)	
Week 3 Sep. 16 & 18	Iran I: The Conquest; Islamization; the Shu‘ubiyya controversy	
Week 4 Sep. 23 & 25	Iran II: Post-Conquest Nativist Prophets and Zoroastrian Rebellion (7th-8th c.)	
Essay 1	Questions posted: Friday 9/27 @ 5pm	Essay 1 due: Sun. 9/29 by 5pm
Week 5 Sep. 30 & Oct. 2	Egypt I: Languages in pre-Islamic Egypt; Coptic; Conquest and slow Arabization	
Week 6 Oct. 7 & 9	Egypt II: Translating the Christian Tradition; Arabic Bible; Arabophone Coptic culture	
Week 7 Oct. 14 & 16	Iran III: Persian Islam: Remembering the pre-Islamic past in early Islamic Iran	
Week 8 Oct. 21 & 23	Narrating Conquest and Conversion I: Islam enters Sind (South Asia)	
Essay 2	Questions posted: Friday 10/25 @ 5pm	Essay 2 due: Sunday 10/27 by 5pm
Week 9 Oct. 28 & 30	Iberia I: The Languages of medieval Andalusia; the 9th-century Cordovan martyrs	
Week 10 Nov. 4 & 6	Iberia II: The Morisco <i>Lead Tablets</i> and Spanish in the colonies (early-modern Spain)	
Week 11 Nov. 11 & 13	Narrating Conquest & Conversion II: Islamization and Epic in the Mongol empire	
Essay 3	Questions posted: Fri. 11/15 @ 5pm	Essay 3 due: Sunday 11/17 by 5pm
Week 12 Nov. 18 & 20	Vernacularization in Europe: Latin to European vernaculars; Normans in Sicily	
Week 13 Nov. 25 & 27	<i>Thanksgiving vacation: no class</i>	
Week 14 Dec. 2 & 4	Vernacularization in India: Sanskrit to regional vernaculars in India	
FINAL PAPER	Finals papers due 12/15 by noon	

Conquest, Conversion, and Language Change — WEEKLY READINGS

1. CRITICAL TERMS I¹

Burbank, Jane and Fred Cooper. *Empires in World History Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, 2010). → Chapter 1, “Imperial Trajectories” (pp. 1-22).

Smith, Jonathan Z. “Religion, Religions, Religious” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark Taylor (Chicago, 1998), pp. 269-284.

Arnal, William. “Definition” in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, ed. William Braun and R. T. McCutcheon (London, 2000), pp. 21-34.

Cavanaugh, William T. “The Myth of Religious Violence” in Andrew R. Murphy, ed. *Blackwell Companion to Religion and Violence* (2011), pp. 23-32.

Bloch, Marc. “The Idol of Origins” in his *Historian’s Craft*... (two-page selection).

2. EARLY ISLAM AND THE ARAB-MUSLIM CONQUESTS²

Lapidus, Ira. *A History of Islamic Societies*..., chaps. 3-5 (pp. 31-80).

Friedmann, Yohanan. *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith relations in the Muslim tradition* (Cambridge, 2003) introduction + chap. 3 (pp. 1-12 and 87-120).

Crone, Patricia. “‘No compulsion in Religion’: Q 2:256 in medieval and modern interpretation” ... pp. 131-144 and 164-169.

* **PRIMARY SOURCES:** Extracts on the Prophet and early battles (6 pp);

Extracts on the Conquests and the early Caliphate (6 pp), and

Extracts: Non-Muslims in the Islamic tradition (6 pp).

3. IRAN I: CONQUESTS, ISLAMIZATION, SHU‘UBIYYA CONTROVERSY³

Sizgorich, Thomas. “Do Prophets come with swords? Conquest, Empire and Historical Narrative in the early Islamic world” *American Historical Review* ** (2007): 993-1015.

Bulliet, “Conversion to Islam and Emergence of Muslim Society in Iran” in Levtzion, *Conversion to Islam*... pp. 30-51.

Mottahedeh, Roy. “The Shu‘ubiya Controversy and the Social History of early Islamic Iran” *IJMES* 7 (1976): 161-182.

Cooperson, Michael. “‘Arabs’ and ‘Iranians’: The Uses of Ethnicity in the Early Abbasid Period” (pp. 364-383).

* **PRIMARY SOURCE:** Balādhurī, *Book of Conquests*... “The Conquest of Iran — Khuzistan” = *The Origins of the Islamic State* (Beirut, 1966), II: 105-24.

4. IRAN II: NATIVIST ZOROASTRIAN PROPHETS AND REBELLION⁴

Daryaei, Touraj. "Zoroastrianism under Islamic Rule," in M. Stausberg & Y. S.-D. Vevaina, eds., *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism* (2015), pp. 103-118.

Crone, Patricia. *The Nativist prophets of early Islamic Iran: Rural Revolt and Local Zoroastrianism* (Cambridge, 2014). → Introduction + chaps. 3, 8, and Conclusion (pp. 1-27, 46-77, 160-178, and 453-493).

5. EGYPT I: COPTIC LANGUAGE, CONQUEST, AND SLOW ARABIZATION⁵

Pohl et al. "Introduction: ethnicity, religion and empire," in: Walter Pohl, Clemens Gantner, Richard Payne, eds., *Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World. The West, Byzantium and the Islamic World, 300-1100* (Farnham/Burlington 2012), pp. 1-23.

Palme, Bernhard. "Political Identity versus Religious Distinction. The case of Egypt in the later Roman Empire" in *Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World...*, pp. 81-98.

Richter, Tonio S. "Greek, Coptic, and the 'Language of the Hijra'. Rise and Decline of the Coptic Language in Late Antique and Medieval Egypt" in H. Cotton et al., eds., *From Hellenism to Islam: Cultural and Linguistic Change in Roman Near East* (Cambridge, 2009), 401-46.

* **PRIMARY SOURCES:**

"Voices of the Conquered" in Kennedy, *Great Conquests* (pp. 344-62);
Baladhuri, *Book of Conquests...* ("Conquest of Egypt"= pp. 335-51).

6. EGYPT II: TRANSLATING THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION; ARAB/IC CHRISTIANITY⁶

Griffith, Sidney. "When Did the Bible Become an Arabic Scripture?" *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 1 (2013): 7-23.

MacCoull, Leslie. "The Strange Death of Coptic culture" in MacCoull, ed., *Coptic perspectives on Late Antiquity* (1993), pp. 35-45.

Zaborowski, Jason. "From Coptic to Arabic in Medieval Egypt" *Medieval Encounters* 14 (2008): 15-40.

Papaconstantinou, Arietta. "'They shall speak Arabic Language and Take Pride in it': Reconsidering the Fate of Coptic after the Arab Conquest" *Le Museon* 120 (2007): 273-99.

Papaconstantinou, Arietta. "Why did Coptic fail where Aramaic succeeded? Linguistic developments in Egypt and the Near East after the Arab conquest" in A. Mullen and P. James, eds. *Multilingualism in the Graeco-Roman worlds* (Cambridge 2012), pp. 58-76.

Rubenson, Samuel. "Translating the Tradition: Aspects of the Arabization of the Patristic Heritage in Medieval Egypt" *Medieval Encounters* 2 (1996): 4-14.

* **PRIMARY SOURCES:** comparing 4 Coptic-Arabic Bible manuscripts (12th-14th c.)

7. NARRATING CONQUEST AND CONVERSION I: ISLAM ENTERS SIND⁷

Asif, Manan Ahmad. *A Book of Conquest: The Chachnama and Muslim Origins in South Asia* (Cambridge, 2016). → Introduction; Chapters 1, 2, 5, 6, and Conclusion (= pp. 1-77 and 150-185).

8. IRAN III: REMEMBERING PRE-ISLAMIC IRAN; PERSIAN ISLAM⁸

Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia, ed., Josef Meri (New York, 2006), s.v. “Persian [language]” and “Persians” (pp. 602-3 and 604-6).

Savant, Sarah. *The New Muslims of Post-Conquest Iran: Tradition, Memory, and Conversion* (Cambridge, 2015). → Introduction, chaps 1, 3, 5, and Conclusion (= pp. 1-28, 31-60, 90-129, 170-97 and 230-5).

Zadeh, Travis. *The Vernacular Qur'an: Translation and the Rise of Persian Exegesis* (Oxford, 2012). → Introduction and Conclusion.

* **PRIMARY SOURCES:** Extracts on Persian/s (3 pp); Extracts on ethnicity (6 pp).

9. IBERIA I: THE LANGUAGES OF MEDIEVAL ANDALUSIA⁹

Bartlett, Robert. *The Making of Europe. Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950-1350* (London, 1993). → Chap. 8 (pp. 197-221).

Gallego, María Ángeles. “The languages of medieval Iberia and their religious dimension” *Medieval Encounters* 9 (2003): 107-39.

Beale-Rivaya, Yasmine. “At the Crossroads of Languages: The Linguistics Choices along Border Communities of the Reconquista in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries.” *Multilingualism in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age: Communication and Miscommunication in the Premodern World*. Ed. Albrecht Classen & Marilyn Sandige (2016), pp. 127-144.

Penelas, M. “Linguistic Islamization of the Mozarabs as attested in a late-ninth-century chronicle” in *Language of Religion, Language of the People. Medieval Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (Munich, 2006), pp. 103-114.

Beale-Rivaya. “The Written Record as Witness: Language Shift from Arabic to Romance in the Documents of the Mozarabs of Toledo in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries.” *La Corónica* 40 (2012): 27-50.

10. IBERIA II: THE MORISCO LEAD TABLETS AND SPANISH IN THE NEW WORLD¹⁰

García-Arenal, Mercedes. “The Religious Identity of the Arabic Language and the Affair of the Lead Books of the Sacromonte of Granada” *Arabica* 56 (2009): 495-528.

Harris, A. Katie. “The Sacromonte and the Geography of the Sacred in early modern Granada” *al-Qantara* 23 (2002): 517-43.

Hanks, William F. *Converting Words: Maya in the Age of the Cross* (Berkeley, 2010). → Introduction + chap. 5 (pp. 1-22 and 118-156).

* **PRIMARY SOURCE:** “A Multilingual Colophon: Iberian Qur’an with inter-lineal *Aljamiado* translations” (3 pp).

11. NARRATING CONQUEST & CONVERSION II: ISLAMIZATION AND EPIC IN THE MONGOL EMPIRE¹¹

de Nicola, Bruno. “The role of the Domestic Sphere in the Islamization of Mongols” pp. 353-365.

DeWeese, Devin. *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde: Baba Tükles and Conversion to Islam in Historical and Epic Tradition* (Philadelphia, 2007). → Introduction, chaps. 1-2 (pp. 3-158).

* **PRIMARY SOURCE** (we’ll discuss it separately): Appendix II, pp. 541-66.

12. LATIN, VERNACULARS, AND MULTILINGUALISM IN EUROPE¹²

Pollock, Sheldon. *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley, 2009). → Intro, chaps. 7 and 11 (= pp. 1-36, 259-280, and 437-467).

Machan, Tim William. “Language contact and linguistic attitudes in the Later Middle Ages” Nevalainen and Traugott, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the History of English* (2012), pp. 518-525.

Johns, Jeremy. *The Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily. The Royal Diwan* (Cambridge, 2002). pp. 1-6 and 284-300. → “Introduction” and chap. 11 (“Royal dīwān and royal image”).

Johns, Jeremy. “The Arabic inscriptions of the Norman kings of Sicily: a reinterpretation” in Maria Andaloro, ed. *The Royal Workshops in Palermo during the Reigns of the Norman and Hohenstaufen Kings of Sicily in the 12th and 13th century* (Catania, 2006), pp. 324-333.

13. NO MEETING: THANKSGIVING BREAK¹³

14. THE SANSKRIT COSMOPOLIS, OR VERNACULARIZATION IN MEDIEVAL INDIA¹⁴

Pollock, Sheldon. *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley, 2009). → selected chapters.

Ricci, Ronni. *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion, and the Arabic cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia* (Chicago, 2011). → selected chapters.