

University of Pennsylvania  
Department of Near Eastern Languages & Civilizations  
**NELC 102: Introduction to the Middle East**  
**Fall 2007**  
**Draft Syllabus**

**Professor Heather J. Sharkey**

Class: Tues. & Thurs., 9-10:30am

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• **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 were 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.

• **Structure, Requirements, Grades, and Policies** •

This class has a lecture format but also provides opportunities for group discussion. Attendance is required; repeated failure to attend classes will result in deductions from the final course grade. Other requirements include two in-class exams, a book review, and one short essay. (Brief details appear below; we will also discuss each assignment ahead of time in class.) There is no final exam.

The two in-class exams will consist of essays, short identification questions, and a map component based on the modern Middle East.

For the book review assignment, students must write an essay of 5-7 pages (typed, double-spaced, 12-point font) on *The Book of Strangers*, and participate in a class discussion on this study of medieval Arabic graffiti.

In the short essay, students will write two pages in response to the following question: How do events in the contemporary Middle East affect your life or your thinking today?

Late papers will be subject to daily five-point penalty deductions. The professor will not accept papers that are more than one week late.

**Grades will be calculated as follows:**

- first in-class exam: 20%
- book review: 25%
- second in-class exam: 30%
- short essay: 10%
- attendance & participation: 15%

• **Books and Readings** •

**The following texts are available and recommended for purchase at the Penn Book Center, 130 South 34th Street (34th & Sansom), Philadelphia. They are also on reserve in Van Pelt library.**

- *Atlas of the Middle East*. Union, NJ: Hammond World Atlas Corp., 2001.
- Berkey, Jonathan P. *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600-1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Dunn, Ross E. *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta: A Muslim Traveller of the 14th Century*. Revised edition. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.
- al-Isfahani, Abu'l-Faraj. *The Book of Strangers: Medieval Arabic Graffiti on the Theme of Nostalgia*. Trans. Patricia Crone & Shmuel Moreh. Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2000.
- *The Koran*, Trans. N.J. Dawood. London: Penguin Books, 1990.
- Lewis, Bernard. *The Arabs in History*. New edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Lewis, Bernard (Ed. & Trans.) *Islam from the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople*. Vol. 1: Politics and War. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Lewis, Bernard (Ed. & Trans.) *Islam from the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople*. Vol. 2: Religion and Society. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Maalouf, Amin. *The Crusades through Arab Eyes*. London: Al Saqi Books, 1984.
- al-Qa'id, Yusuf. *War in the Land of Egypt*. Trans. From the Arabic by Olive and Lorne Kenny and Christopher Tingley. Northampton: Interlink Books, 1997.
- Robinson, Francis (Ed.). *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

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§ **COURSE PLAN** §

**Part 1: The Making of the Islamic Middle East**

**Week 1: Understanding the Middle East: An Introduction**

- Bernard Lewis, *The Arabs in History*, pp. 1-31.
- Jonathan P. Berkey, *The Formation of Islam*, pp. 3-53.

Guiding Questions:

What is Islam, what is a Muslim, and what is an Arab? Which parts of the Middle East are “Arab”; which are not?

**Week 2: Muhammad and His Message**

- Bernard Lewis, *The Arabs in History*, pp. 32-64.
- Jonathan P. Berkey, *The Formation of Islam*, pp. 57-75.
- *The Koran*, Trans. N.J. Dawood, “Clots of Blood,” p. 429, and “The Cow,” pp.

11-42.

•Bernard Lewis, *Islam*, Vol. 1., pp. 213 (“Abu Bakr on the Rules of War”), 234-37 (“Peace Terms”); Vol. 2, pp. 1-2 (“How the Qur'an Was Assembled”), 217-19 (“The Pact of Umar”).

Guiding Questions:

Who was Muhammad and what role did he play in the rise of Islam?

How was the Qur'an revealed, compiled, and arranged? How would you describe its content?

Who were the first Muslims?

### **Week 3: Arab Expansion, Islamic Conquest, and State Formation**

•Bernard Lewis, *The Arabs in History*, pp. 65-124.

•Jonathan P. Berkey, *The Formation of Islam*, pp. 76-109.

•Bernard Lewis, *Islam*, Vol. 1, pp. 25-26 (“The Fall of the Umayyads”); Vol. 2, pp. 69-78 (“Baghdad”).

***Class Discussion: Next Week's Exam***

Guiding Questions:

Why did the death of Muhammad cause a crisis in the Muslim community, and trigger a dispute over Muslim leadership that persists to this day?

Who was the “caliph” and what was the “caliphate”?

How and why did Islam spread beyond Arabia? What motivated the early Islamic conquests?

### **Week 4: The Rise of Baghdad**

***First In-Class Exam***

Guiding Questions:

Who are the Umayyads, who are the Abbasids, and how did power move between them?

What were the political and cultural implications of the eighth-century shift in power from Syria to Iraq?

### **Week 5: Islamic Dynasties, c. 750-1000**

•Bernard Lewis, *The Arabs in History*, pp. 125-41.

•Patricia Crone, “The Rise of Islam in the World,” in Robinson, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World*, pp. 2-31.

•Jonathan P. Berkey, *The Formation of Islam*, pp. 113-40.

•Bernard Lewis, *Islam*, Vol. 2, pp. 87-101 (“Sicily”), 157-65 (“The Markets of Seville”).

***Class Discussion: How to Write a Book Review***

Guiding Questions:

By 661 AD, leadership of the Muslim community had moved out of Arabia. How important is Arabia to Islamic history after 661?

Which areas become most important as centers of Islamic government and culture between c. 750 and 1000?

How far had Islam spread (geographically or culturally speaking) by c. 1000?

### **Week 6: The Seljuk Turks**

•Abu'l-Faraj al-Isfahani, *The Book of Strangers: Mediaeval Arabic Graffiti on the Theme of Nostalgia*.

***Review Essay Due on The Book of Strangers***

### **Week 7: Holy Wars? The Crusades, Past and Present**

•Amin Maalouf, *The Crusades through Arab Eyes*.

Guiding Questions:

Reflect on Amin Maalouf's text: How did the Crusades look through Arab eyes? Did the Crusade experience differ among Middle Eastern Muslims, Christians, and Jews? (Otherwise phrased, did the European Crusaders distinguish between Middle Eastern Muslims, Christians, and Jews?)  
Assess the long-term effects of the Crusades on the Middle East.  
What is the difference between a crusade and a jihad?  
What legacies of the Crusades do we carry today?

### **Week 8: The Mamluks & Mongols**

- Ross E. Dunn, *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta*, pp. 1-105.
- Robert Irwin, "The Emergence of the Islamic World System, 1000-1500," in Robinson, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World*, pp. 32-61.
- Bernard Lewis, *Islam*, Vol. 1, pp. 81-84 ("The Last Caliph of Baghdad" and "The Fall of Baghdad").

#### Guiding Questions:

Who were/are the Turks, and why were Turkish soldiers so important in Islamic armies?  
What was a Mamluk? Describe military slavery in this period.  
Who were the Mongols, where did they come from, and what motivated them? Which parts of the Middle East did they conquer? What impact did they have?

## **SPRING BREAK**

### **Part 2: Social and Intellectual Trends**

### **Week 9: Patterns of Social, Cultural, and Intellectual Life**

- Basim Musallam, "The Ordering of Muslim Societies," in Robinson, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World*, pp. 164-207.
- Francis Robinson, "Knowledge, Its Transmission, and the Making of Muslim Societies," in Robinson, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World*, pp. 208-49.

•Stephen Vernoit, "Artistic Expressions of Muslim Societies," in Francis Robinson, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World*, pp. 250-90.

#### Guiding Questions:

According to Basim Musallam, what were some of the defining features of Muslim cities, families, and social life in the Middle East of the Mamluk and Ottoman eras? According to Musallam, how common was polygamy in practice?  
What patterns of economic globalization have tied the Islamic world, past and present, together?

### **Week 10: The Ottomans**

•Stephen D. Dale, "The Islamic World in the Age of European Expansion, 1500-1800," in Robinson, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World*, pp. 62-89.

#### Guiding Questions:

Who were the Ottomans? What was the difference between an "Ottoman" and a "Turk", and what do historians usually mean when they write about the "Ottoman Turks"? How did the Ottoman Empire change in scope over time, and to what extent did the empire include parts of what the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe? To what extent was the Ottoman Empire a European empire?

*Class Discussion: Next Week's Exam*

## Part 3: The Modern Era

### Week 11: Ottoman and Western Imperialisms

• Sarah Ansari, “The Islamic World in the Era of Western Domination: 1800 to the Present,” in Robinson, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World*, pp. 90-121.

#### Guiding Questions:

How did the European powers affect Middle Eastern political destinies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries?

How has the United States exerted its influence in the Middle East since World War II? Would you describe the United States today as an imperial power?

#### ***Second In-Class Exam***

***Note that attendance remains mandatory for the classes following the second in-class exam. We will have more opportunity for discussion in these last three weeks.***

### Week 12: Big Themes in Early and Mid-Twentieth-Century Middle Eastern History

• Yusuf al-Qa'id, *War in the Land of Egypt* (Northampton, MA: Interlink Publishing, 1997), pp. 5-60.

Lectures will touch upon issues including nationalism, colonialism and its aftermath, the emergence of Israel and the Palestinian refugee crisis, etc.

### Week 13: The Middle East since c. 1979

• Yusuf al-Qa'id, *War in the Land of Egypt*, pp. 61-192.

The year 1979 witnessed the signing of an Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty (following the Camp David Accords) and the culmination of the Iranian Islamic Revolution. We will consider these two events as a departure point for a discussion of the contemporary Middle East.

In this week, too, we will spend one class discussing the novel *War in the Land of Egypt*. Consider the following as a basis for discussion: “The Egyptian government banned Yusuf al-Qa'id's novel, *War in the Land of Egypt*, so that it could not be sold on Egyptian soil. In your view, what possible threat could this novel pose to Egyptian government interests?”

### Week 14: The Middle East Today

***Second Short Assignment Due:*** How do current events in the Middle East affect your life or your thinking? Respond in two pages and be prepared to share your reflections in a class discussion.