



Department of History
Crown Center for the Humanities
Lake Shore Campus
6525 N. Sheridan Road | Chicago, Illinois 60626
Phone 773.508.2221 | Fax 773.508.2153

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INTRODUCTION TO ISLAMIC HISTORY

HISTORY 312

MWF, 12:35–1:25, DU–4

Zouhair Ghazzal

Crown 547, MWF, 1:30–2:30

(and by appointment)

(773) 508-3493

zghazza@luc.edu

This course is an analysis of the main forces that empowered the expansion of Islam as a religious and social system in the Arabian peninsula, providing later for the logistics of the Islamic “conquests,” *futūḥāt*, into a series of rapid and overwhelming “successes,” while attempting at integrating populations with different religious, linguistic, ethnic and economic structures. The outcome was the creation of large empires, in the line of previous defunct pre-Islamic empires such as the Roman, Byzantine, and Sassanian, but with new elements brought to their bureaucratic, economic, and social structures. We shall focus on two such empire-formations, the Umayyād and ‘Abbāsīd in particular (the rise of the Mamluk and Ottoman dynasties shall be touched upon very briefly in interlude for the modern Middle East). The bulk of our material belongs to the social history genre, both descriptive and analytical, beginning with Maxime Rodinson’s life of the prophet Muhammad, and the social and political history of the early Islamic empires, in addition to the main cultural and intellectual trends in the sciences, philosophy, theology, jurisprudence, the arts and sufism.

Islam as a religious “message” came into being in the Arabian peninsula in the first half of the seventh century, in a region located between two powerful empires, the Sassanian and Byzantine, and whose social structures were, and still are, “tribal,” hence based on family and kinship affiliations and loyalties. In the Islamic view of the world, the one based on the Qur’ān and *hadīth*, the sayings and doings of the prophet Muhammad (both sources are considered as the scriptures of Islam), the prophet (ca. 570-632) was only a “medium” through which God “revealed” his “message” to humanity. Thus the act of “revelation,” *wahī*, is considered central to the ancient and modern Islamic mythologies. The opening verses (*āyāt*) of chapters (*sūra-s*) 96 and 74 of the Qur’ān are generally recognized as the oldest revelations (the timing and method of “editing” the Qur’ān are both hotly debated issues among scholars, with some placing the final “editing,” which presumably did not respect the time sequence of the chapters, as late as the early ‘Abbāsīd period); Muhammad’s vision is mentioned in 53:1-18 and 81:19-25, and the night of the first revelation in 97:1-5 and 44:3. At first in private and then publicly, Muhammad began to proclaim his message: that there is but one God and that Muhammad is His messenger, *rasūl*. Thus right from the beginning, Muhammad’s message was “religious,” in the sense that it challenged the beliefs of pagan society that worshipped a multitude of Gods. Of course, Muhammad’s monotheism had nothing unique since it was preceded by the Judeo-Christian traditions—

and the Qur'ân is full of references to both—but the Qur'ân introduced, however, a new way of worshipping God, in addition to a concept of “sin” so radically different from previous monotheistic (and pagan) traditions, that a new concept of man-God relationship had emerged.

But the main impact of Islam, however, was social and political, involving such crucial things as the political entity of the *umma*; strict rules of inheritance between the sexes, members of the same family and clan, and between generations; a list of “duties,” known as the “five pillars” that involve pilgrimage, fasting, almsgiving, praying, and the *shahâda*; and military expansionism in the form of a jihadic ideology. It is therefore not surprising to learn that Muhammad’s “message” was met with a great deal of resistance in his home town of Mecca (where the *Ka'ba*, originally a pagan monument celebrating pilgrimage, truce among warring factions, and free trade, was located) to the point that the prophet decided to move to Medina, a city about 250 miles north (called Yathrib at the time). This move, mythologically referred to as the *hijra*, emigration, took place in 622, the first year of the Muslim calendar. (Muslim dates are usually preceded by A.H., “Anno Hegirae,” the year of the *hijra*.) From Medina, it took the prophet ten years, since the *hijra* in 622 until his sudden death in 632, to lay down the foundations of Islam as a religion and state ideology.

Concerning this course in particular, let me start by a general remark about the title itself: “Introduction to Islamic History” might indeed give the false impression that there is some entity called “Islam” that needs to be defined and analyzed as such, i.e. as a “totality” or as a “spirit” that conserved itself over the centuries. By contrast, in a title like *A History of Islamic Societies*, which is borrowed from the survey book by Ira Lapidus, published in 1988, an explicit recognition is made of a multitude of Islamic experiences that evolved historically; and the discovery of these diverse experiences in time and space shall be our main concern throughout this course. Moreover, the process of Islamicization of societies as diverse as the Byzantine provinces of the Fertile Crescent, or the Zoroastrian societies of the Sassanian Empire, or the fragmented societies of North Africa, has never been fully implemented, meaning that lots of the customary practices that survive until this day were of non-Islamic origin; not to forget that “Islam” also implies different practices in different terrains. We would therefore analyze Islamic practices within various historical and regional variations and meanings rather than Islam in general.

The fifteen centuries of Islamic histories (including the pre-Islamic century known as *Jâhiliyya*, ignorance) are contained within discrete “periods”—period is here taken in a straightforward sense, that of a historical time dominated by a ruling dynasty, or a “pattern of government,” which may or may not involve structural changes vis-à-vis other time frameworks (many of which are, for instance, challenged in Hodgson’s *Venture of Islam*): 1. The prophetic mission and the establishment of the first Islamic communities in the Arabian peninsula. 2. The Islamic “conquests,” or more accurately the “openings,” *futûhât*. 3. The defeat of the followers of ‘Alî ibn Abû Tâlib, son-in-law and cousin of the prophet, which in practice meant the subservience of the Shî‘is to Sunni dynasties, and their consecration as a minority sect, beginning with the first Islamic empire, the Umayyad, with Damascus as its capital (661-750). 4. The transfer of power from the Umayyads to the ‘Abbâsids, in the wake of the so-called Abbasid revolution in 750, with Baghdâd becoming the new capital of the empire. 5. With the ‘Abbâsids, Islamic civilization was at its best—in particular the early ‘Abbâsid period in 750-833, known as the “golden” era of Islam, which witnessed the formation and maturation of philosophy, theology, sufism, jurisprudence, hadith editing, the arts and “sciences” as well. 6. The beginning of dismantlement of the ‘Abbâsid empire into

rival entities (833-945), a period particularly notorious for the power of the *Mamâlik* who were slave born soldiers, and who later ruled in Syria and Egypt; in 945 the Shii Buwayhids took power in Baghdad, transforming the Abbasid caliph into a mere puppet; and then in 1055 it was the turn of the Seljuk Turks to conquer Baghdad, both events had unearthed the militaristic tendencies in Islamic civilization; finally, the destruction of Baghdad by the Mongols in 1258 put an end to the old style of empire formation. 7. After several mini-dynasties ruling for brief periods of time (e.g. the Fatimids and Ayyubids), a new political status quo with quasi-“unification” schemes of the central territories came into existence with the rise and empowerment of the Mamluks and then the Ottomans on the eastern Mediterranean. 8. The majority of the Arab lands lived under Ottoman rule for four centuries, an experience of tremendous consequences on their modern colonial and postcolonial history. 9. The dismantlement of the Ottoman empire after World War I and the establishment, until WWII, of the French and British colonial rules. 10. The end of WWII also meant, for the majority of the Arab countries, the end of colonial rule and the first postcolonial “national” states—some like Algeria received their independence much later (1956). 11. The present period is that of postcolonial failed “national” states, dominated in the majority of cases by state ruled economies and military and/or tribal dictatorships.

There are several methods to write such a complex history. Two are of particular interest for our purposes. The first would consist of a broad political history, not the chronological type, but a Tocquevillian type of analysis. (I’ve mentioned a western author that you might be familiar with, but a more accurate description would be a “Khaldunian” type of history—in reference to Ibn Khaldûn, the 14th-century Arab historian from the Maghreb.) Such a history would be primarily concerned with stable or unstable state formations from the point of view of their dynastic lineages. In other words, in order to make our analysis possible, we’ll have to imagine the political as an “autonomous” sphere with its own *modus operandi* and logic. We would thus analyze, say, the ‘Abbâsid empire from the standpoint of dynasties “coming together” and being subservient to one other: What was the logic behind this type of rule, and how did it hold together for long periods? What notion of the political stood behind this type of state formation? What type of political representations emerged? How did this type of society produce such a polity?

This is obviously very different from the chronological history that we’re familiar with and which presupposes that what comes “after” is explained by what was there “before”—a “natural” unfolding of events as history. The political history we’ll be aiming at requires a much more abstract and analytical work.

The second alternative would be some kind of social history: a study of social and economic structures and their evolution in space and time. The work of Fernand Braudel on the expansion of European capitalism between the 15th and 18th centuries naturally comes to mind. Time is here considered as multi-layered, where the social structures, in contrast to the political, evolve very slowly and have a tempo of their own. Social agglomerations like cities, villages and countryside, and institutions like the family, the judiciary, and land tenure could be studied within a Braudelian horizon, i.e. extensively and over several centuries.

It is of course impossible to cover such material in a general course, and our approach shall be necessarily eclectic. For instance, there’s a great deal of chronology in the early Islamic history, with the rise of Islam and the “conquests.” A pure social history would therefore be inappropriate because it would fail encompassing ideological and political tensions, or, in short, to explicate what made Islam as a worldly religion possible. By contrast, the Ottoman empire, with its less than colorful political and intellectual life would be more apt for a socio-economic analysis.

GENERAL

We'll discuss our weekly readings collectively in class. Your participation is essential for the success of the course. You'll also have to complete presentations based on the weekly readings and term-papers (see below). Instructions on the presentations will be posted in due time on Blackboard.

In addition to the two-draft free-topic paper (see below the section on papers), you'll have to submit three interpretive essays based on our weekly readings: you'll receive sets of questions for each. *Each paper counts as 20 percent of the total. **All interpretive essays are take-home and you'll be given a week to submit them.** The purpose of the interpretative essays is to give you the opportunity to go "beyond" the literal meaning of a text and adopt interpretive and "textual" techniques. A failing grade in all interpretive essays means also a failing grade for the course, whatever your performance in the term-paper is. **All essays and papers must be submitted on time according to the deadlines set below.***

First Interpretive Essay	20%
Second Interpretive Essay	20%
Final Interpretive Essay	20%
Term-paper: 2 drafts 10% each	20%
Presentations, Blackboard postings, and class attendance and participation	20%

- It is essential that you complete all readings on time, and that you come to class well prepared. **Always come to class with the required book:** we'll discuss all readings extensively.
- The first, second, and final interpretive essays are all based on our weekly readings. They all consist of a single essay for which you'll receive the appropriate questions at the dates below, and you'll submit them in class a week later.
- The question handouts will only be distributed in class—no email communication.
- For all five papers follow the procedures outlined below in the section on papers.
- Essays and papers are to be submitted only in class. Do not email or fax any material. Do not submit your papers outside the classroom.
- It's your responsibility to submit all essays and papers *in class* on time at the required deadlines. Late papers will be graded accordingly, and papers submitted a week after the deadline will be graded F.
- You must also submit, in addition to the printed hard copies, an equivalent electronic file of each paper in the digital dropbox on Blackboard.
- Each non-submitted paper will receive the grade of F, and your final grade will be averaged accordingly.
- The mid-term paper is a free-topic exercise based on a list of authors/books that you should begin researching as soon as possible.
- If you do not show up for an assigned presentations, you'll be graded F.

READINGS

This schedule is subject to change, pending on our progress during the semester. Dates of interpretive essays indicate when the essay questions will be distributed in class.

- Week 1: August 27, 29, 31
Maxime Rodinson, *Muhammad*, New Press 2002, 1565847520.
- Week 2: September 5, 7
Rodinson (continued)
- Week 3: September 10, 12, 14
Rodinson (continued)
- Week 4: September 17, 19, 21
Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad*, Cambridge UP 1998, 0521646960.
- Week 5: September 24, 26, 28
Madelung (continued)
- September 28: first interpretive essay**
- Week 6: October 1, 3, 5
Muhammad Ali Khalidi, *Medieval Islamic Philosophical Writings*, Cambridge 0521529638.
- Week 7: October 10 & 12
Khalidi (continued)
- Week 8: October 15, 17, 19
Jonathan P. Berkey, *The Formation of Islam*, Cambridge UP 0521588138.
- Week 9: October 17, 19, 21
Berkey (continued)
- Week 10: October 29, 31 & November 2
Roy Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in Early Islamic Society*, I.B. Tauris 2001, 1860641814.
- November 2: second interpretive essay**
- Week 11: November 5, 7, 9
Khalidi (continued)
- Week 12: November 12, 14, 16, 19
Efraim Karsh, *Islamic Imperialism*, Yale 0300122632.
- November 19: first draft deadline**
- Week 13: November 26, 28, 30
Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art*, Yale 0300040466.
- November 30: final interpretive essay**
- Week 14: December 3, 5, 7
presentation of term-papers
- December 7: deadline for submitting term-papers**
deadline for submitting final interpretive essay

PAPERS

You are requested to write one major research paper to be submitted on December 7. You will have to submit, however, a first draft of this paper on November 19. The first draft should be as complete as possible and follow the same presentation and writing guidelines as your final draft, and it will count as 10% of your total grade unless the final draft is of superior quality. The purpose of the first draft is to let you assess your research and writing skills and improve the final version of your paper. It is advisable that you choose a research topic and start preparing a bibliography as soon as possible. I would strongly recommend that you consult with me before making any final commitment. It would be preferable to keep the same topic for both drafts. You will be allowed, however, after prior consultation, to change your topic if you wish to do so.

You may choose any topic related to the social, economic, political, or cultural history of any Islamic society up to the early Ottomans. Even though papers on the Ottoman Empire might be accepted pending on the subject, no paper should cover contemporary twentieth-century topics. *Papers should be analytical and conceptual.* Avoid pure narratives and chronologies and construct your paper around a main thesis.

Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 5th ed., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987. Intended for students and other writers of papers not written for publication. Useful material on notes and bibliographies.

December 7: FINAL DRAFT DEADLINE

Keep in mind the following when preparing your preliminary and final drafts:

- once you've decided on a paper-topic and prepared a preliminary bibliography, post an abstract and bibliography of your topic on blackboard <blackboard.luc.edu> (see below). Your abstract should include: (i) title; (ii) description; (iii) sources; (iv) methodology (e.g. suggestions on how to read sources). **Your preliminary draft will not be accepted unless you've submitted an on-line abstract before November 16.**
- preliminary drafts should be submitted on time, November 19.
- preliminary drafts should be complete and include footnotes and an **annotated bibliography**. (The Turabian reference above is annotated: it briefly spells what the book is about and to whom it might be useful.)
- do not submit an outline as a first draft.
- incomplete and poorly written first drafts will not be accepted, and you'll be advised to revise your first draft completely.
- if you submit a single draft throughout the semester, you'll receive F for 10% of the total and your final grade will be averaged accordingly.
- the oral presentation is an essential aspect of your grade; if you can't attend the last session, request an appointment.
- **your final draft should take into consideration all the relevant comments provided on your earlier draft:**
 - all factual and grammatical mistakes should be corrected, in addition to other stylistic

- revisions.
- passages indicated as “revise” or “unclear” or “awkward” should be totally revised.
 - when specific additional references have been suggested, you should do your best to incorporate them into your material.
 - there might be several additional suggestions in particular on your overall assumptions and methodology. It will be up to you to decide what to take into consideration.
 - **submit the final draft with your preliminary corrected one.**
 - if you’re interested in comments on your final paper and interpretive essay, request an appointment by e-mail.

Please use the following guidelines regarding the format of your papers:

- use 8x10 white paper (the size and color of this paper). Do not use legal size or colored paper.
- use a typewriter, laser printer or a good inkjet printer and hand in the original.
- only type on one side of the paper.
- should be double spaced, with single spaced footnotes at the end of each page and an *annotated bibliography* at the end (see bibliography below).
- keep ample left and right margins for comments and corrections of at least 1.25 inches each.
- all pages should be numbered and stapled.
- **a cover page should include the following: paper’s title, course number and section, your name, address, e-mail, and telephone.**

Electronic forum

This course is listed on the Loyola Blackboard webpage to freely post messages and conduct discussions: login at <blackboard.luc.edu> and follow the instructions.

Besides a synopsis of all your presentations and term-paper, you must post each week at least one news item on the Middle East and/or Islamic societies.

References: general

The following bibliography is highly selective and restricted to books and articles which are representative of a particular historical or sociological/anthropological trend. Students are thus encouraged, when writing their papers, to use more extensive bibliographies related to the topics they are dealing with. Some of the books for our weekly discussions include such bibliographies. (It would be wiser if you discuss with me your papers' topics *before* you start writing.)

The *Qur'ân* is the holy book of the Muslims (in all their different factions and sects) delivered by God in Arabic to the community of believers (*umma*) through the "medium" of the prophet Muhammad in sessions of "revelation" (*wahî*). Thus Arabic is not only the language of the Qur'ân (and the Sunna), but also a divine language, the language of God. All translations of the Qur'ân are thus considered as illegitimate and inaccurate. There are several such "translations"/"interpretations" available. A classical one would be that of A.J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (Oxford University Press). For a recent "reading" of the Qur'ân, see Jacques Berque, *Relire le Coran* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1993).

R. Stephen Humphreys, *Islamic History. A Framework for Inquiry* (Princeton University Press, 1991), is a long annotated and commented bibliography, thematically organized. Recommended for those looking at the best in the field for sources available in English, French and German. Some references to primary sources, mainly Arabic medieval sources, are also included. The problem with this "inquiry" is that it excludes from its field all publications in modern Arabic, as well as Turkish and Persian. In short, this book is an excellent tool for a primary survey of the status of Middle Eastern Studies in Europe and North America.

Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 3 vols. (Chicago University Press, 1974), is a landmark study on the "origins" of Islam and its historical evolution into empires. Recommended for those interested in Islam within a comparative religious and geographical perspective.

Ira Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), is a complete fourteen-century history of Islamic societies. Chapters vary in depth and horizon. No particular focus—tedious to read. I haven't read the second edition: check it out.

Bernard Lewis (ed.), *The World of Islam* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), is a thematically organized book with chapters on literature, jurisprudence, sufism, the cities, the Ottoman and modern experiences. Includes hundreds of illustrations and maps.

Watt, W. M., *Muhammad at Mecca* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953); *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), both are classics describing the life of the Prophet and his first achievements in Mecca and Medina.

Franz Rozenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1952); 2d rev. ed., 1968.

Roy Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society* (Princeton University Press, 1980), an excellent book, based on primary sources from Southern Iraq that describe the process and concept of *bay'a* in early Islamic thought.

Hugh Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate: A Political History* (London: Croom Helm, 1981).

Jacob Lassner, *The Shaping of Abbasid Rule* (Princeton University Press, 1980).

Lassner, Jacob, *Islamic Revolution and Historical Memory: An Inquiry into the Art of 'Abbâsid Apologetics* (American Oriental Series, number 66.) New Haven: American Oriental Society. 1986.

The History of al-Tabarî (State University of New York Press, 1989), is a multi-volume series of the translation of the “History” of Tabarî, one of the major historians and interpreters of the Qur’ân of the early Islamic and empire periods.

al-Shâfi‘î, *Risâla. Treatise on the Foundations of Islamic Jurisprudence*, translated by Majid Khadduri (Islamic Texts Society, 1987). Shâfi‘î was the founding father of one of the four major schools of Sunni jurisprudence and the *Risâla* contains some of his major theoretical foundations on the notions analogy, *qiyâs*, and the *ijmâ‘*, consensus of the community.

Martin Lings, *Muhammad. His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (Rochester, 1983).

Newby, Gordon Darnell, *The Making of the Last Prophet: A Reconstruction of the Earliest Biography of Muhammad* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989).

Maxime Rodinson, *Muhammad* (Pantheon, 1971), is an interesting interpretation of the early Islamic period based on a social and economic analysis of the Arabian Peninsula at the dawn of Islam.

M. A. Shaban, *Islamic History. A New Interpretation*, 2 vol. (Cambridge University Press, 1971), is an attempt towards a new interpretation of the ‘Abbâsid Revolution of the eight century as a movement of assimilation of Arabs and non-Arabs into an “equal rights” Empire.

Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence* (Cambridge, 1991). See also the great classic of Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950).

Ignaz Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law* (Princeton University Press, 1981).

Fred Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton University Press, 1981), reconstructs the early Islamic Conquests (*futûbhât*) from a wealth of Arabic chronicles and literary and ethnographic sources.

Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago University Press, 1988), discusses the notion of “government” and “politics” in Islamic societies.

Ann Lambton, *Continuity and Change in Medieval Persia. Aspects of Administrative, Economic and Social History, 11th-14th Century* (The Persian Heritage Foundation, 1988).

Dominique Urvoy, *Ibn Rusbd (Averroes)* (Routledge, 1991). Henry Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital* (Princeton University Press, 1960), is an analysis and interpretation of Hayy ibn Yaqzân.

Salma Khadra Jayyusi, editor, *The Legacy of Muslim Spain* (Leiden: Brill, 1993). See also L. P. Harvey, *Islamic Spain, 1250 to 1500* (Chicago University Press, 1990).

Regional references

• Early & medieval Islam

Al-Azmeh, Aziz. *Muslim Kingship*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1997, 2001.

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Chamberlain, Michael. *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190-1350*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Cook, Michael. *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

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- Zaman, Muhammad Qasim. *Religion and Politics Under the Early 'Abbasids: the emergence of the proto-Sunni elite*, Leiden: Brill, 1997.

• The Ottomans and modern Turkey

- Berkes, Niyazi. *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, New York: Routledge, 1998.
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• Egypt, Syria & Lebanon

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• The Maghreb

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• Iraq

- Litvak, Meir. *Shi'i Scholars in Nineteenth-Century Iraq: the 'ulama' of Najaf and Karbala'*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
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• Iran, Pakistan & Afghanistan

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