Town and Country in the Medieval Islamic World

HIS 511c Seminar in Historical Research and Writing

Seminar in Historical Research and Writing Fall 2015

HIS 511c, Tuesdays, 3:30 – 6:20, MHRA Building 2210

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Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:00-3:00 PM, by appointment

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Description:

At a time when western Europe was thought to have been cut off from the rest of the Mediterranean world in a post-Roman insular “Dark Ages”, the Medieval Islamic world, from the 8th to 12th centuries reached a thriving pinnacle of civilization. The Islamic lands included a complex system of cities and subsidiary towns, innovative new agricultural and industrial technologies, and far-flung trading networks from the Mediterranean Sea (and western Europe) to East Asia. It is precisely the unifying force and openness of Islamic culture superimposed over these vastly different geographies from Spain to Central Asia that allowed for an expansive yet inter-connected framework of economic and social exchanges. The first goal of the class is to explore the depths and extent of the nature of urbanism and rural settlements, land use and the spread of agricultural crops and techniques, manufacturing industries and trade, and the economy of the Medieval Islamic world. We will contextualize this world in the Late Antique/early Medieval Mediterranean and its connections with the Europe and Asia. The second goal in this class is to learn how to use, locate, and analyze a rich body of primary sources including contemporary translated documents and material culture gathered from archaeological reports. Over the course of several stages, you will produce a final research paper on a topic of your choosing which draws upon a synthesis of your historical and archaeological research with secondary sources. No prior knowledge of Islamic history is required for the course.

Student Learning Objectives:

- Undergraduate students will acquire analyze historical duration, succession, and change in terms of human agency and larger systems or structures in a wide variety of places and periods within medieval Islamic history with specific regards to its urban, rural and agricultural, industrial, and economic manifestations.
• Students will use historical thinking to contextualize and analyze primary and secondary sources representing different points of view. Specifically they will learn how to use archaeological evidence from reports as primary sources alongside textual accounts in building an interdisciplinary methodology which intersects history and historical archaeology.

• Students will conduct original research by investigating and interpreting primary source materials (including texts and material culture from archaeological reports) and secondary source material. In addition, they will learn the stages of researching (including library work, note-taking, and source criticism) and critique the written work of their peers in constructive ways.

• Finally, students will use evidence-based reasoning to interpret the past coherently while developing and presenting an original persuasive argument orally and in writing to produce a 15-20 page research paper.

• Graduate students will acquire or perfect research skills appropriate to the production of a 20-30 page research paper.

There will be one 3 hour class per week. Please read the assigned materials during the week assigned and come to classes prepared with questions and observations.

No prerequisite is required to take this course.

Readings:

Readings for each week are given on the attached syllabus. Readings listed under the lecture mean you will have read those in advance for that lecture day. Weekly assignments consist of readings from selected works. Please come prepared and able to comment on the readings in class. In addition to the assigned readings, additional readings have been placed on reserve and will be useful for those wishing to explore subjects (particularly for papers) in detail.

There is required textbook for the course, available at the bookstore.


The following will be important for your papers:


The Princeton Geniza Project (over 2,000 searchable documents online) http://gravitas.princeton.edu/tg/tt/


Study aids, though not a requirement for the course, might be useful in preparing for the paper and providing useful basic reference information for Islamic history and civilization. They include:


Bosworth, C. E., The Islamic Dynasties. Jackson Library stacks Tower 8 D199.3.I8 No. 5

Writing Center: In addition to seeking the instructor’s advice about writing assignments, you can seek assistance in the Writing Center in 3211 of the MHRA Building (334-334-3125), http://www.uncg.edu/eng/writingcenter/

Course Requirements:

Grading

Participation 15%

Assignments 1-5: 25%

Assignment 6: Rough Draft: 10%

Assignment 7: Final Presentation: 10%

Assignment 7: Final Paper 40%

Assignments

Assignment 1: Individual Readings/Presentations (Aug 25, Sept 1, Sept 8, Sept 15, Sept 18)

Assignment 2: Project Description Due (Sept 18)

Assignment 3: Preliminary Bibliographies Due (in class presentations) (Sept 29)

Assignment 4: Report of one archaeological source Due (Oct 6)

Assignment 5: Historiographical Essay/Literature Review Due (Oct 20)

Assignment 6: Rough Draft Due (please bring 3 copies to class) (Nov 3)

Assignment 7: Final Presentation (Nov 17)

Assignment 8: Final Paper Due (Nov 30)

Class Rules:

Attendance is mandatory, as the class only meets once per week and lectures will frequently include material not covered in the assigned readings, for which you will also be responsible. On several days, you will be presenting a reading or group of readings as part of the seminar discussion. If you miss more
than one class period for any reason, your final grade will be reduced by 2 points for each additional absence.

**Academic Integrity:** Any violation of the honor code (plagiarism or cheating) will be dealt with according to UNCG’s academic integrity policy. As this course is about researching a topic and writing a paper based on primary and secondary sources, I do not wish to see plagiarism from the web. I strongly urge you not to use any websites (besides library databases) except as a means to find printed sources. If you have good reason to use a website rather than a printed source, you must clear it with me. For specific explanations about UNCG’s academic integrity policy, see [http://academicintegrity.uncg.edu/](http://academicintegrity.uncg.edu/).

Please do not come late to class as it disrupts the class for both your fellow classmates and for me. Cellular phones **must** be silenced or turned off in the classroom. If you disrupt class by talking on the phone or text messaging, you will be asked to leave. Laptops may **not** be used in the classroom.

The best way to contact me is by email. Please note that I will only check and respond to emails Monday through Friday during the work day; i.e. don’t expect me to respond to an email at 2 am on a Saturday.

**Lecture and Reading Schedule:**

**Week 1 (August 18)**

Introduction, Pirenne, History and Archaeology, the Cairo Geniza, Geographers

**Week 2 (August 25)**

**The Towns: Cities and Urban Life**

Group Readings:


Individual Readings (Assignment 1):


Week 3 (September 1)

The Country: Agriculture and Rural Life

General Readings:


Individual Readings (Assignment 1):


Week 4 (September 18)

The Routes: Trade over Land and Sea

General Readings:


Abu Lughod, J. Before European Hegemony, selected chapters.
Individual Readings (Assignment 1):


Week 5 (September 15)

The Industries: Ceramics, Glass, Sugar, Timber, Gold, Textiles, Spices, Incense

Project Description with 5 Research Questions (a paragraph) is due

Presentations on an industry from the readings (Assignment 2)

Individual Readings (Assignment 1):


**Week 6 (September 22)**

**Library Research Seminar**

**Week 7 (September 29)**

**In class presentations and discussions of proposals**

Preliminary Bibliographies due (Assignment 3)

**Week 8 (October 6)**

**Reading an Archaeological Report**
Report of one archaeological source due (Assignment 4)

General Readings:


Andren, “The Dialogue of Historical Archaeology” Between Artifacts and Texts, p. 145-177

Individual Readings:

TBA (Based on your topic)

Week 9 (October 13)

No Class – FALL BREAK

Week 10 (October 20)

Individual Meetings

Historiographical Essay/Literature review due (Assignment 5)

Week 11 (October 27)

Individual Meetings

Week 12 (November 3)

Individual Meetings

Rough Drafts Due. Send an electronic copy of your draft to both me and the classmates who are critiquing your work by noon. (Assignment 6)

Week 13 (November 10)

In-class, small-group critiques of rough drafts.

Peer-critiques are due.
Week 14 (November 17)

Last day of class, in-class group meeting and presentations.

Final Presentations given (Assignment 7)

Week 15 (November 24)

No Class - Thanksgiving

Final Papers due Monday, November 30th at noon. (Assignment 8)
Sample Topics for Research Papers:

Town
  Siraf/Persian Gulf
  Aden
  Fustat/Cairo
  Sijilmassa

Country
  Irrigation
  Land Tax

Industry
  Agriculture in Egypt, Linen and Flax
  Sugar
  Spice and Drug
  Coins and Money
  Glass
  Ceramics

Trade
  Levant Trade and the West
  Indian Ocean Trade
  Chinese/Silk Route Trade
  African Trade – Gold
  Slave Trade
  Shipping and Commerce in the Mediterranean

Merchants
  Jewish Merchants