Town and Country in the Medieval Islamic World

HIS 411c Seminar in Historical Research and Writing

Seminar in Historical Research and Writing Fall 2022

HIS 411c, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3:30-4:45

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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 two classes per week of 1 hour and 15 min. 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.

*Summaries: Please write a one or two paragraph synopsis of each reading. The synopsis should include: the citation of the source, a brief overview of what the author is arguing, and your own thoughts building on what you know and have read.

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/](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 1-6: 25%

Assignment 1: Reading Summaries 1-8/Individual Presentations

Assignment 2: Project Description

Assignment 3: Preliminary Bibliographies (in class presentations)

Assignment 4: Report of one archaeological source

Assignment 5: Historiographical Essay/Literature Review

Assignment 6: Introduction

Assignment 7: Rough Draft: 10%

Assignment 8: Final Presentation: 10%

Assignment 9: Final Paper 40%
**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.

**COVID INFORMATION (Please Read)**

As we return for Fall 2022, all students, faculty, and staff and all visitors to campus are required to uphold UNCG’s culture of care by actively engaging in behaviors that limit the spread of COVID-19. While face-coverings are optional in most areas on campus, individuals are encouraged to wear masks. All individuals and visitors to campus are asked to follow the following actions:

- Engaging in proper hand-washing hygiene.
- Staying home when ill.
- Complying with directions from health care providers or public health officials to quarantine or isolate if ill or exposed to someone who is ill.
- Completing a self-report when experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, testing positive for COVID-19, or being identified as a close contact of someone who has tested positive.
- Staying informed about the University’s policies and announcements via the COVID-19 website.
Students who are ill, quarantining, or isolating should not attend in-person class meetings, but should instead contact their instructor(s) so alternative arrangements for learning and the submission of assignments can be made where possible.

As we continue to manage COVID-19 on our campus, we are following the lead of the local health department and we will adjust our plans to balance student success, instructional requirements, and the hallmarks of the collegiate experience with the safety and wellbeing of our campus community.

Lecture and Reading Schedule:

Week 1 (Aug 16 and 18)

Aug 16

Introduction

Aug 18

Pirenne, History and Archaeology, the Cairo Geniza, Geographers

*Watch: Islam: Empire of Faith, parts 1 and 2 on YouTube.

Assignment 1 Summary 1 DUE: summary and reflection on the documentary and what is something you never knew before and something that interested you above all else, 2-3 pages.

Week 2 (Aug 23 and 25)

The Towns: Cities and Urban Life

Debate over the Islamic City

Aug 23.

A. Group Readings (read both):


Assignment 1 Summary 2 DUE: summary of readings

Aug 25.

B. Individual Readings (Assignment 1): - Pick one reading from Section B and C

PICK ONE OF THESE FOUR. PRESENT ITS VIEW IN THE ISLAMIC CITY DEBATE


C. Individual Readings (Assignment 1)

PICK ONE OF THESE THREE.


Assignment 1 Summary 3 Due: summary of both readings

Week 3 (Aug 30 and Sep 1)

The Country: Agriculture and Rural Life

Debate over the Agricultural Revolution, Role of Nomads vs the State

Aug 30.

A. General Readings:


PICK EITHER THESE THREE. CRITIQUE THE DEBATE OVER THE ISLAMIC AGRICULTURAL REVOLUTION


Decker, M. “Plants and Progress.”

OR THESE THREE. CRITIQUE THE DEBATE OVER THE ROLE OF NOMADS VS THE STATE


**Assignment 1 Summary 4 DUE: summary of readings**

Sept. 1

**B. Individual Readings (Assignment 1)**

**PICK ONE FROM EITHER SECTIONS B1 or B2.**

**B1. Irrigation, Canals, Gardens**


**B2. Pastoralists, Nomads, Marsh Dwellers, Mountain Dwellers**


**Assignment 1 Summary 5 DUE: summary of reading**

Week 4 (Sept 6 and 8)
The Routes: Trade over Land and Sea

Sept. 6.

A. General Readings:


Abu Lughod, J. Before European Hegemony, Chapters 5, 6, 7.

Assignment 1 Summary 6 DUE: summary of readings

Sept 8.

B. Individual Readings:


Mango, M. M. “Byzantine Trade: local, regional, interregional and international.”


Assignment 1 Summary 7 DUE: Summary of reading

Week 5 (Sept 13 and 15)

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

Sept 13

A. General Readings

Lambourn, Abraham’s Luggage, Ch. 1, Introduction

Assignment 1 Summary 8 DUE: Summary of readings – general and individual

Sept 13 and 15, overflow.

B. Individual Readings:


**Assignment 2 DUE: Project Description with 5 Research Questions (a paragraph)***

Week 6 (Sep 20 and 22)

Lambourn, *Abraham’s Luggage*, Chapters 2 and 3

**In class presentations and discussions of proposals.**

*You will also be expected to ask questions and provide suggestions for others’ presentations.*

Week 7 (Sep 27 and 29)

Sept 27.
Library Research Seminar with Maggie Murphy (Meet in citilab in the Library at 3:00).

Sept 29.

Lambourn, *Abraham’s Luggage*, Chapters 4 and 5


*FOR NEXT WEEK, LOCATE AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL REPORT SUITABLE TO YOUR PAPER TOPIC.*

**Assignment 3 DUE: Preliminary Bibliographies**

Week 8 (Oct 4 and 6)

**Reading an Archaeological Report**

Oct. 4

Lambourn, *Abraham’s Luggage*, Chapters 6 and 7

A. General Readings:


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

Oct. 6

Lambourn, *Abraham’s Luggage*, Chapters 8 and 9

B. Individual Readings:

TBA (Based on your topic)

[Report of one archaeological source due (Assignment 4)]

Week 9 (Oct 11 and 13)

**NO CLASS-FALL BREAK**
Week 10 (Oct 18 and 20)

Paper Writing Workshop: Writing the Introduction

[Historiographical Essay/Literature review due (Assignment 5)]

Week 11 (Oct 25 and 27)

Organizing the Paper and Content

NO GROUP CLASS, RATHER Individual Meetings, schedule in 10 minute blocks in my office.

* Schedule these during class time, during office hours, or by arrangement with me for another time.

Assignment 6 DUE on October 25th: Introduction

Week 12 (Nov 1 and 3)

Editing and Revising the Paper (In MHRA Computer Lab, first floor)

*be able to access the LATEST version of your Rough Draft in the Computer Lab.

Assignment 7 DUE: Rough Drafts. Send an electronic copy of your draft to both me and the classmates who are critiquing your work at the end of class, November 3rd.

Week 13 (Nov 8 and 10)

Nov 8

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

DUE: Peer-critiques

Nov 10

Individual Meetings – schedule with me, 10 min in my office/zoom, Nov 10 or 15

Week 14 (Nov 15 and 17)

Nov 15.

Individual Meetings – schedule with me, 10 min in my office/zoom, Nov 10 or 15

Nov 17.
NO CLASS– Instructor at conference

Week 15 (Nov 22 and 24)

NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 16 (Nov 29 and Dec 1 – Reading Day)

Final presentations

ASSIGNMENT 8 DUE: Final Presentations

ASSIGNMENT 9 DUE: Final Papers due

Sample Topics for Research Papers:

Town

Siraf/Persian Gulf

Aden

Fustat/Cairo

Sijilmasa
Country

Irrigation

Land Tax

Industry

Agriculture in Egypt, Linen and Flax
Sugar
Spices and Drugs
Coins and Money
Glass
Ceramics

Mining/Metal Production
Pastoralism
Medicine
Slaves
Silk

Trade

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

Viking and Northern European Trade

Merchants, Economy, Transportation

Jewish Merchants
Charity in the Islamic World
Medieval Partnership
Road Systems and Transportation

Nomads
Waystations