Town and Country in the Medieval Islamic World

HIS 511c Seminar in Historical Research and Writing

Seminar in Historical Research and Writing Spring 2010

HIS 511c, Tuesdays, 3:30 – 6:20, MHRA Building 3204

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Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday 10:00-11:00 PM

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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 knowledge of medieval Islamic history with specific regards to its urban, rural and agricultural, industrial, and economic manifestations.
- Students will also 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 also construct persuasive written arguments with the use of primary source materials (including texts and material culture from archaeological reports) as supporting evidence, learning to locate, read, and critique primary sources and analyze and synthesize the writings of modern scholars (as historiography).
- Finally, students will produce a 15-20 page research paper, learn the stages of researching (including library work, note-taking, and source criticism) and critique the written work of their peers in constructive ways.
- 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 Paper 50%

Assignments

Assignment 1: Individual Readings/Presentations (Jan. 26, Feb. 2, Feb. 9, Feb. 16)

Assignment 2: Project Description Due and Presentation of an Industry (Feb. 16)

Assignment 3: Research Proposals and Preliminary Bibliographies Due (in class presentations)
Assignment 4: Report of one archaeological source Due (March 16)

Assignment 5: Historiographical Essay/Literature Review Due (March 30)

Assignment 6: Rough Draft Due (please bring 3 copies to class) (April 20)

Assignment 7: Final Paper Due (May 10)

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/.

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 (January 19)

Introduction, Pirenne, History and Archaeology, the Cairo Geniza, Geographers
Week 2 (January 26)

The Towns: Cities and Urban Life

Group Readings:


Individual Readings:


Week 3 (February 2)

The Country: Agriculture and Rural Life

General Readings:


Individual Readings:


Week 4 (February 9)

The Routes: Trade in the Mediterranean Sea, Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, the Black Sea, and the Silk Road

General Readings:


Abu Lughod, J. *Before European Hegemony*, selected chapters.

Individual Readings:


Week 5 (February 16)

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**

Individual Readings:


Week 6 (February 23)

Library Research Seminar with Dr. Stephen Dew

Week 7 (March 2)

In class presentations and discussions of proposals

Research Proposals and Preliminary Bibliographies due

Week 8 (March 9)

No Class – SPRING BREAK
Week 9 (March 16)

Reading an Archaeological Report

**Report of one archaeological source due**

General Readings:


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

Individual Readings:

TBA (Based on your topic)

Week 10 (March 23)

Individual Meetings

Week 11 (March 30)

Individual Meetings

**Historiographical Essay/Literature review due**

Week 12 (April 6)

Individual Meetings

Week 13 (April 13)

No Class – Professor is at a conference

**Rough Drafts Due.** Send an electronic copy of your draft to both me and the classmates who are critiquing your work by noon.
Week 14 (April 20)
In-class, small-group critiques of rough drafts.

Peer-critiques are due.

Week 15 (April 27)
Individual Meetings

Week 16 (May 4)
Last day of class, in-class group meeting

Final Papers due Monday, May 10th at noon.
Topics for Research Papers:

Levant Trade and the West
Indian Ocean Trade
Chinese/Silk Route Trade
African Trade – Gold
Slave Trade
Agriculture in Egypt, Linen and Flax
Sugar Industry
Spice and Drug Industry
Jewish Merchants
Shipping and Commerce in the Mediterranean
Coins and Money
Siraf/Persian Gulf
Aden
Fustat/Cairo
Sijilmassa