Town and Country in the Medieval Islamic World

HIS 411c Seminar in Historical Research and Writing

Seminar in Historical Research and Writing       Spring 2020

HIS 411c, Wednesdays, 4:00 – 6:50, MHRA 2204

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Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 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.

*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/


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: Reading Summaries 1-4/Individual Presentations (Aug 23, Aug 30, Sept 6, Sept 13)

Assignment 2: Project Description Due (Sept 13)

Assignment 3: Preliminary Bibliographies Due (in class presentations) (Sept 27)

Assignment 4: Report of one archaeological source Due (Oct 11)

Assignment 5: Historiographical Essay/Literature Review Due (Oct 18)
Assignment 6: Rough Draft Due (please bring 3 copies to class) (Nov 1)

Assignment 7: Formal Final Presentation (Dec. 6)

Assignment 8: Final Paper Due (Dec. 6)

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 15)

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

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

Week 2 (January 22)

The Towns: Cities and Urban Life

Debate over the Islamic City

A. Group Readings:


B. Individual Readings (Assignment 1):

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


C. Individual Readings (Assignment 1)

PICK ONE OF THESE THREE.


[Summary 1 due]

Week 3 (January 29)

The Country: Agriculture and Rural Life

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

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


B. Individual Readings (Assignment 1)

PICK ONE FROM EITHER SECTIONS B1 or B2.

B1. Irrigation, Canals, Gardens


B2. Pastoralists, Nomads, Marsh Dwellers, Mountain Dwellers


[summary 2 due]
Week 4 (February 5)

The Routes: Trade over Land and Sea (with guest Dr. Omar Ali)

A. General Readings:


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

B. Individual Readings:


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


Priestman, S. “The Silk Road or the Sea? Sasanian and Islamic Exports to Japan.” *Journal of Islamic Archaeology* 3.1 (2016) 1-35.


[summary 3 due]

**Week 5 (February 12)**

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

A. General Readings

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

B. Individual Readings:


*Project Description with 5 Research Questions (a paragraph) is due (Assignment 2)*

*summary 4 due and presentations on an industry from the readings*

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**Week 6 (February 19)**

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.*

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**Week 7 (February 26)**

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

Frenkel, M. and A. Lester “Evidence of Material Culture from the Geniza – An Attempt to Correlate Textual and Archaeological Findings,” in *Material Evidence and Narrative Sources: Interdisciplinary*
Studies of the History of the Muslim Middle East, D. Talmon-Heller and K. Cytryn-Silverman, eds. (Brill, 2014), pp. 147-187

Library Research Seminar with Maggie Murphy (Meet in citilab in the Library at 7:00).

Week 8 (March 4)
Lambourn, Abraham’s Luggage, Chapters 6 and 7

NO CLASS-SPRING BREAK

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

[Preliminary Bibliographies due (Assignment 3), emailed to me]

Week 9 (March 11)
Lambourn, Abraham’s Luggage, Chapters 8 and 9

Reading an Archaeological Report

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

B. Individual Readings:
TBA (Based on your topic)

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

Week 10 (March 18)

Paper Writing Workshop: Writing the Introduction (In MHRA Computer Lab, first floor)

* Schedule these during office hours or by arrangement with me for another time. They can also be on Tuesday’s office hours and by appointment.

[Historiographical Essay/Literature review due (Assignment 5)]
Week 11 (March 25)

Organizing the Paper and Content

Individual Meetings, schedule in 10 minute blocks in my office.

Week 12 (April 1)

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.

[Rough Drafts Due.] Send an electronic copy of your draft to both me and the classmates who are critiquing your work at the end of class. (Assignment 6)

Week 13 (April 8)

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

[Peer-critiques are due.]

Week 14 (April 15)

[Submit Assessment of Peer Critiques]

Week 15 (April 22)

Week 16 (April 29)

In-class group meeting and formal presentations.

[Final Presentations given (Assignment 7)]

*[Final Papers due! (Assignment 8)]*
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

Merchants, Economy, Transportation
- Jewish Merchants
- Charity in the Islamic World
- Nomads
- Waystations
Medieval Partnership

Road Systems and Transportation