

## The Medieval School in Islam

Professor Rula Jurdi Abisaab

**ISLA 515**

Jan. 5-April 14, 2015

Leacock Building, Rm. 116

Mondays: 3:35-5:25

Office Hours: M.Th. 12:30-1:30 & by appointment

### **The *madrasa* (school) in Medieval Islamic Society**

**Course Description:** Focuses on the rise and spread of the *madrasas* in medieval Islamic society particularly in Iraq, Greater Syria, Persia, and Egypt. It sheds light on the structure and politics of learning at the *madrasas*, the financial and administrative support for them, the curriculum of study and pedagogies, and the relationship between teacher and student. It also illuminates forms of academic evaluation, and looks closely at the *ijāzā* (scholarly license) as an accrediting tool delineating its varied functions. The course also sheds light on the questions of scientific knowledge at the *madrasa*, women's learning, and the architectural features of the *madrasa*. Through a set of representative studies on the *madrasa*, the course brings attention to the heated debates surrounding the institutional rigor, and academic and social aims of the *madrasa*, as well as the role of elite and court politics in shaping Islamic learning. The course also inquires into the global historical processes of learning exploring the connection between the medieval Islamic *madrasa* and the early European college.

*McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see <http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity> for more information).*

*L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site <http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity>).*

***In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.***

***This right applies to all written work that is to be graded, from one-word answers to dissertations.***

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**Required Readings** (purchased at Paragraph Bookstore):

Daphna Ephrat, *A Learned Society in a Period of Transition: the Sunni 'ulama' of the Eleventh-Century Baghdad.*

George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges. Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West.*

Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo.*

Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190-1350.*

**Grade Division:**

- **Attendance & Participation:** All the Students in Class Will Participate Fully in the Discussion Sessions (Total= 25%). I will evaluate each student's level of preparation and

engagement with the readings, and the quality of questions asked and the comments made during every session.

- **2 Book Reviews**, each 10% x (Total= 20%) (Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*; Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus*)
- **Oral Presentation** (15%): Each student will give a 15-minute presentation elucidating her/his views on a set of questions pertaining to the *madrassa*, drawing directly upon the readings covered and advancing one's informed opinion on them. I will give you the list of questions around 2 weeks before the oral presentation.
- **Power-Point Group Presentation on the Architecture of the Madrasa:** (Group Grade=15%)
- **Final Paper** (25%): **on a topic pertaining to Learning during the Medieval and Early Islamic Period**

## Readings

### Week 1

Introduction to the Course

\* Expectations for the Course- The Question of the Sources for Your Paper

### Week 2: Baghdad

**Read half the book** of Daphna Ephrat, *A Learned Society in a Period of Transition: the Sunni 'ulama' of the Eleventh-Century Baghdad* (2000).

#### Suggested Readings:

- Wadad Kadi, Read the introduction to *Islam and Education: Myths and Truths* (only **until page 319**) accessed through <http://farooq.files.wordpress.com/2008/03/education-in-islam-myths-and-truths.pdf>
- "Madrassa," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Second Edition. Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs. Brill, 2010

### Week 3:

**Complete** Ephrat, *A Learned Society in a Period of Transition*.

### Week 4: Baghdad

**Read half the book** of George Makdisi. *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*.

### Week 5:

**Complete** Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*

### Week 6: Cairo

**Read half the book** of Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*.

### Week 7:

**Complete the book** of Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge*  
**Submit First Book Review**

### **Week 8: Damascus**

**Read half the book of** Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus*, 1190-1350.

### **Week 9:**

**Complete** Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*  
**Submit Second Book Review**

*Students will receive a list of questions to be prepared for the public debate on the madrasa, which will occur in class Week 11. Each student will be expected to give a 15-minute presentation on where s/he stands with respect to the list of questions pertaining to the madrasa. We will then have time to push the conversation further and offer new ideas about these questions. The failure to participate in this debate or attend will result in an F for this assignment.*

### **Week 10:**

**Classes Canceled----- Reading Week, March 2<sup>nd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup>**

### **Week 11**

#### ***Public Debate***

Each student will take 15 minutes to defend a set of features pertaining to the medieval *madrasa* and debunk others providing proofs directly based on our readings, and drawing upon the viewpoints of different scholars in the books we covered.

*At the end of this session the class will be divided into two groups and each group will be expected to meet on its own to organize the delivery of a 40-minute power-point presentation on the architecture of the Medieval madrasa to be presented Week 13. You can have each student contribute 5 slides on a particular madrasa providing both central information about it as well as on its architecture, context and history of its foundation. Below are some of the links and resources you can use:*

<http://archnet.org/>

<http://islamic-arts.org/2011/the-ottoman-madrassa/>

[http://acc.teachmideast.org/texts.php?module\\_id=12&reading\\_id=118&sequence=16](http://acc.teachmideast.org/texts.php?module_id=12&reading_id=118&sequence=16)

"Isfahan x. Monuments (4) Madrasas", *Encyclopedia Iranica*,  
<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/isfahan-x4-madrasas> (On the architecture/art of the madrasas)

Suggested Readings for the Architecture of the *madrasa*:

Yasser Tabbaa, *Construction of Power and Piety in Medieval Aleppo*

Stephen Blake, *Half the World: the Social Architecture of Safavid Isfahan*

### **Week 12: Women, Learning, and the *madrasa***

**Complete** Asma Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam (2013)*—  
*Placed on 3-hour Reserve Shelf at the Institute of Islamic Studies*

Suggested Readings:

1- Yousef Rapoport, "Women and Gender in Mamluk Society," highlights women's education and the *madrasas*, pages 1-47. [http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/MSR\\_XI-2\\_2007-Rapoport.pdf](http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/MSR_XI-2_2007-Rapoport.pdf)

2- Jonathan Berkey, "Al-Subki and His Women," pages 1-17.  
[http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/MSR\\_XIV\\_2010-Berkey-pp1-17.pdf](http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/MSR_XIV_2010-Berkey-pp1-17.pdf)

3- Women and education in the pre-modern Middle East: Reconstructing the lives of two female jurists (*faqīhāt*). An MA Thesis by Saadia Yacoob, McGill University,  
[http://digitool.library.mcgill.ca/webclient/StreamGate?folder\\_id=0&dvs=1396317294753~229](http://digitool.library.mcgill.ca/webclient/StreamGate?folder_id=0&dvs=1396317294753~229),  
Chapter 2, p 53-81.

**Week 13:**

**Classes Cancelled—Renaissance Society Conference in Berlin, March 23-27**

**Week 14:**

**The Architecture of the *madrasa*: Piety and Education**

**Group Assignment:**

Each student group will give a 40-minute power point presentation on the architecture of the medieval Islamic *madrasa(s)*. Students will get a group grade.

**If time permits we will have a 5-minute presentation of the topic of your final paper with a particular focus on the nature of your sources**