ISLA 350
From Tribe to Dynasty: the rise of Islam, 7th-9th Century

Course Description
And they say What a [queer] Prophet! He eats food and goes about in the market place!.... And the unjust ones say, You Muslims are only following a victim of sorcery. (Salvation: 4-8)

Examines the historical forces that led to the emergence of Islam in 7th-Century Arabia and its transformation from a tribal to a dynastic religion spreading throughout Asia, North Africa, and Europe (Sicily and Spain). It delineates the nature and implications of the social conflicts and political rifts arising in early Islamic society during the reign of the four ‘rightly-guided’ Caliphs (r.632-656). It also highlights the theological and philosophical inquiries which preoccupied Muslims at the time and the central developments which led to the foundation of the first and second Islamic dynasties, namely, the Umayyad and the early ‘Abbasid. The course looks closely at the institutional, socio-political and intellectual developments during this period and sheds light on questions of sovereignty; legitimacy and dissent are brought to bear on the rulers’ relations to their subjects.

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 ).

Required Reading
a- Books Purchased from Paragraph Bookstore, 2220 McGill College Avenue
Jonathan Berkey, The Formation of Islam, 600-1800¹
F. E. Peters, A Reader on Classical Islam

¹ For supplementary reading: Fred Donner, Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam; Kennedy, When Baghdad Ruled the World.
b- Books on the Islamic Library Reserve (2 hours)
W. Montgomery Watt, Muhammad at Mecca
________. Muhammad at Medina
________. Free Will and Predestination
. Moojan Momen, Introduction to Shi`i Islam, chapters 1, 2 and 3
. Reynold A. Nicholson, The Mystics of Islam, chapters 2, 3, and 4
. Wael Hallaq, The Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law, chapters 2 (Islamic Legal
Ethic) 5 (Prophetic Authority and Legal Reasoning), 6, (Legal Theory)

c- Articles Available Electronically
Mahmood Ibrahim, “Social and Economic Conditions in Pre-Islamic Mecca,” IJMES
Rula Jurdi Abisaab, “Deconstructing the Modular and the Authentic: Husayn Muroeh’s
Early Islamic History,” Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies, vol.17, issue 3,
(Fall 2008): 239-59.

Some of the materials for this course may be modified. In such case, you will be notified
and provided with an updated syllabus.

Course Requirements
Students are expected to attend class regularly, and to participate in the discussion of
assigned materials and raise central historical points. Students are also expected to
respond to central questions raised in class on the assigned materials.
A student who has more than 3 unexcused absences is advised to drop the course.

There will be one Midterm on Wednesday, Oct. 16th and a Final Exam (date specified
by university). Exams will be comprehensive written exercises, each combining 5
identification questions (12.5 POINTS) and 15 longer questions (87.5 POINTS).

There are 4 Map Quizzes (See last 2 pages for guidelines) covering the region of
Arabia, Syria, Iraq and Muslim Spain.

Students are also required to write a 10-12 page-paper that falls within one of the
fields of inquiry listed below. The paper is due Wednesday, November 27th. You can
give it to me in class or drop it in my mailbox on the same day at the main office of
the Institute of Islamic Studies, Morrice Hall, 4th Floor.

- The Ka`ba during pre-Islamic and Islamic times
- Aspects of the Prophet’s life in Mecca or Medina
- The early Muslims’s relations to the Christians and Jews of Arabia
- Doctrinal and/or Mystical dimensions of the Qur`an
- Succession to Prophet Muhammad
- Sunnism and the Caliphate
- The political-doctrinal features of `Alid Loyalism and Twelver Shi`ism
- Aspects of the socio-political and Intellectual history of the Umayyad period
Your Final Grade is based on the following division:
Active Participation – Discussion Sessions (15% divided: 5%, 5%, 5%)
Class attendance (10%)
4 Map Quizzes (10%, 2.5% each)
Midterm (20%)
Final Exam (25%)
Paper (20%)

Reading Assignment

Week 1
Wed., Sep. 4th
Introduction to the Course

Mon. Sep. 9th
Geographical History and Terms
The Qur’an: Introduction

Week 2
Wed. Sep 11th
Arabia before Islam
The Qur’an
(‘Uthmanic Recension; the Suras)

(Recommended: The Qur’an: Creation,
Adam, the Ka’ba

Mon. Sep. 16th
The Rise of Islam
The Pilgrimage Ritual; Moses;
The Muslims’ Jesus

Week 3
Wed. Sep. 18th
Mecca on the Eve of Islam
Mahmood Ibrahim, “Social and Economic

Map Quiz 1

Mon., Sep. 23rd
Prophet Muhammad
Prophet’s Birth; Khadija; First Revelation

Week 4
Wed., Sep. 25th
Writing Early Islamic History: the hunafa’
Mecca; Pre-Islamic Monotheism

Week 5
Mon. Sep., 30th
Discussion Session 1: Key Words, Concepts, and Events

Wed., 2nd
Prophet Muhammad
Opposition of Quraysh; Migration to Abyssinia; Boycott
Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 1-14, 46-64
Peters, *A Reader*, 59-63

Map Quiz 2

Mon., Oct. 7th
Prophet and Internal Politics
Migration to Yathrib (al-Madina);
Constitution; the Jewish Tribes;
The Farewell Pilgrimage
Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 151-180
Peters, *A Reader*, 68-83, 94

Map Quiz 3

Mon., Oct. 14th
Holiday- no courses

Wed., Oct. 16th
Midterm Exam

Mon. Oct. 21st
Sects and Social Conflict-
Abbasid Revolution
Juridical and Religious Powers of the Sunni Caliph
Berkey, *Formation*, 83-109
Peters, *A Reader*, 142-148

Wed. Oct. 23rd
Philosophical Schools
Watt, *Free Will and Predestination*, “The Mu’tazila” (pp. 61-73) & “Al-Ash’ari..” (pp. 135-147)

Map Quiz 4

Mon., Oct. 28th
Qur’an: Created or Uncreated
Theology; Philosophy
Peters, *A Reader*, 172, 358-368

Wed., Oct. 30th
Week 10

**Mon., Nov. 4th**
Legal Ethics; Prophetic Authority  
Reading the Qur’an  
Hallaq, *Origins*, Chs. 2 & 5  
Peters, *A Reader*, 191-198

**Wed., Nov. 6th**
Orientation Session-Islamic Studies Library

Week 11

**Mon., Nov. 11th**
Discussion Session 2: Key Words, Concepts, and Events

**Wed., Nov. 13th**
Legal Theory  
Hallaq, *Origins*, Ch. 6

Week 12

**Mon., Nov. 18th**
Sufism  
Nicholson, *The Mystics*, Ch.2, 3  
Qur’an; Ascension; Heavenly Book  
Peters, *A Reader*, 165-170

**Wed., Nov. 20th**
Sufism-Continued  
Nicholson, *The Mystics*, Ch. 4  
Portraits of Mystics (Junayd, Al-Hallaj)  
Peters, *A Reader*, 330, 335-343

Week 13

**Mon., Nov. 25th**
Sunni traditionalism and Sufism  
Berkey, *Formation*, 141-158  
Tradition, Scripture and the Law  
Peters, *A Reader*, 213-227

**Wed., Nov. 27th**
Transformation in Medieval Islamic Society  
Berkey, *Formation*, 179-183, 189-215  
The 12th Century Haram; the Hajj  

* Due Date for submitting Final Paper

Week 14

**Mon., Dec. 2nd**
Succession to Muhammad  
Momen, *Introduction*, Chs.1, 2
Tues., Dec. 3rd (Assigned by McGill to compensate for the loss of an earlier Monday)

Discussion Session 3: Key Words, Concepts, and Events

Guideline for Map Quizzes

Map 1- Pre-Islamic and Islamic Arabia

. South Arabia: Hadramawt, Yemen
. Hejaz: Mecca (Makka), Medina (Yathrib)
. Najd
. The Red Sea\(^2\), Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea
. Oman
. Bahrayn
. The Geographical Spread of the Sassanid Empire
. Mesopotamia/Iraq, the area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers
. Baghdad and the ancient Sassanid city of Ctesiphon (al-Mada’in)
. The Tigris
. The Euphrates River
. Major Iraqi Cities: Mosul, Kufa, Basra

Map 2- Persia, Transoxiana

. Sassanid Empire in Persia whose major cities were: Tabriz, Isfahan, Shiraz and Nishapur
. Rayy (a bit south of today’s Tehran, capital city of Iran)
. Major regions in Persia: Azerbaijan, Tabaristan, Khorasan, Sistan and Kirman

\(^2\) Known as Bahr al-Qulzum
. Herat (in modern-day Afghanistan)

. Transoxiana: name given to part of Central Asia corresponding approximately to modern-day Uzbekistan, Tajikstan, southern Kyrgystan, and southwest Kazakhstan.

. Major cities in Transoxiana: Bukhara, Samarqand, Merv (or Marw)

. Black Sea, Caspian Sea, Aral Sea

**Map 3, Syria**

. Syria and its major cities: Antioch, Aleppo, Edessa (al-Ruha), Damascus

. Jerusalem (southern Syria or modern Palestine)

. Mediterranean Sea

. The Byzantines: Constantinople

**Map 4: Egypt, Iberia-Ifriqiya**

. Egypt: Alexandria, Cairo

. Ifriqiya (North Africa): Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya

. Jabal Tariq (Gibraltar)

. Geographical Spread of Muslim Spain under the Umayyads

. Major Cities of Muslim Spain: Cordoba, Seville, Toledo