Imam al-Shafi‘i (d. 820), the founder of one of the schools of Islamic law once asked his companion, the Egyptian scholar Yunus b. Abd al-A‘la: Have you entered Baghdad before? Yunus answered: “No.” Then Imam al-Shafi‘i commented: “Then you have not seen the world!”

"How blessed you are to live in al-Andalus, with its waters, its shade, its rivers, its trees! If Paradise lies somewhere else than in this country of yours, and if one were to choose between the two, it would be your country I would choose.” Ibn Khafaja (d. 1139)

The course explores the formation of medieval Islamic cultures and the dynamics of state and society stretching from Baghdad in the East to Cordoba in the West. Emphasis is laid on the socio-political, intellectual, scientific, literary, and artistic history of the Muslim peoples under the Umayyad Dynasty in Spain (the western Islamic lands) and the Abbasid Dynasty in Iraq, Syria, Persia and Arabia (the eastern Islamic lands) from the 8th until the 12th century. The course depicts the integration of Arab, Berber, Mongol, Persian, and Turkish peoples into the context of a unified Islamic history. It looks into the Arab, Greek, Persian, and Turkic cultural synthesis in the eastern Islamic lands and the Arab, Berber, Hispanic synthesis or Convivencia in the western Islamic lands. It highlights the types of challenges facing the Muslim peoples in these regions from the 10th century onward with the decline of the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates and the fragmentation of power.

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.

Required Reading: Texts, Articles and Excerpts

A. Books

B. Course Pack
______. When Baghdad Ruled the Muslim World (Da Capo Press, 2004), 11-50.
______. The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates (Harlow, 2004), 123-155; 210-243 & 265-282.

Moshe Sharon, Black Banners from the East, Chapter 4 (pp. 73-100).
Colby, Frederick, ”The Early Imami Shi’i Narratives and Contestation over Intimate Colloquy Scenes in Muhammad’s Mi`raj,” Chapter 6 (pp. 141-56) in The Prophet’s Ascension: Cross-Cultural Encounters, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2010)

Suzanne Stetkevych, The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy (Indiana University Press, 2002), Chapter 5 (144-179)


Philip Hitti, History of the Arabs, Chapters 34 to 40 (pp. Pages: 493-536; 537-565)
Richard Fletcher, Moorish Spain, Chapters 4, 6, and 7.

C. On Reserve (3-hr)

D. Articles Online
Gaston Wiet, Baghdad: Metropolis of the Abbasid Caliphate, Chapter 5.

http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/med/wiet.asp

Baghdad under the Abbasids (depicted by the geographer Yaqut al-Hamawi)
http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/1000baghdad.asp

The hadith, Sahih al-Bukhari, vol.4, book 54, hadith number 429 (online). See

Frank Griffel, “Abu Hamid al-Ghazali,”
http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/al-ghazali/


General Reference Works
Encyclopaedia of Islam
R. Roolvink, Historical Atlas of the Muslim Peoples
W. C. Brice, An Historical Atlas of Islam

Course Requirements and Evaluation
Students are expected to attend class regularly, go through the assigned readings, raise and respond to basic questions, as well as participate fully in the discussion of assigned materials.

Each week half the students in the class (going by family name in the alphabetical order) will be responsible for raising 2 informed and critical questions related to the readings. The second half of the class has to answer these questions as accurately as possible and engage other students in the discussion. The week after, the second half of the class (going by family name in the alphabetical order) will do the same and this pattern continues until the end of the semester. A good part of the grade is placed on whether your questions touch a core theme or topic in the readings, and whether your answers to other questions show that you have engaged seriously in the readings.

Assignments:
1- A Primary Source Analysis due Wednesday, October 15th. This analysis is 8-10 pages long involving an examination of the Arabic account of the medieval historian, al-Tabari depicting the struggle between two sons of the Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid (r. 786-809). This Tarikh (History) vol.31 by al-Tabari on “The War between Brothers” is available in English translation by Michael Fishbein. Based on this source, you need to assess the main areas of contention between the two brothers, Al-Amin (r. 809-813) and al-Ma’mun (r. 813-833), the sons of the Caliph Harun al-Rashid, and what al-Tabari’s position and views are on this discord. The sections of your paper are:
1st: Explain how al-Tabari organizes his historical materials (for example; based on yearly events) and whether he uses advise or religious verses or wise sayings to support his views.
2nd: Summarize the main reasons for the conflict between the brothers
3rd: Shed light on the way al-Tabari presents each brother and whether he expresses certain preferences or biases in support of one or the other. Look also at whether al-Tabari presents multifaceted features of their struggle or contradictory views on it and on the brothers themselves.

In order to complete these sections of the paper you need to read the translator's forward to this source and the following pages: 1-44, 134-150, 173-205, 210-225. There are also maps that help you look at the locations mentioned in the account.

2- A Final Paper of 12-15 pages long due December 3, the last day of classes. By early November you should have a topic for this paper of your choosing but related to the general themes and framework of the class. Make sure that you have clarity about the period(s) and place(s) pertaining to your paper, and the set of questions you are trying to research and answer. Your Bibliographical List for this paper should have no less than 8 sources ranging from academic books, to articles, to encyclopedic entries and critical essays.

In terms of style, use a consistent form of citation for notes and bibliography, preferably The Chicago Manual of Style. A simplified and concise sample for endnotes, footnotes and bibliography in historical writing is provided by Mary Lynn Rampolla’s, A Pocket Guide to Writing in History, 4th edn., St. Martin’s Press, 2004, 77-134. A copy of it is available at the Reserve Desk at the Islamic Library.

Grade Division:
Your final grade is based on the following division:

Class attendance (10%)

Active Participation (35%): Your performance will be evaluated on the basis of these categories:
E (excellent 90-95) reflecting in-depth, accurate and detailed answers to many questions; V (Very Good 85-90) reflecting accurate but less detailed answers to many questions; G (Good 80-85) reflecting accurate and detailed answers to only some questions; S (Satisfactory 75-70) reflecting accurate but very broad or very brief answers to a couple of questions; N (Not Satisfactory 60-65) reflecting a general accurate answer for one question; F (Failing below 60) reflecting lack of study.

Primary Source Analysis (25%)

Final Paper (30%)

Week 1
Wednesday, Sep.2 Introduction to the Course
Week 2

Monday, Sep. 8

When the world spoke Arabic (Lorsque le monde parlait arabe), Part 1: The Arabs make their Entrance. 26 minutes & Part 2: Once Upon a Time Baghdad. 26 minutes. (DS36.85 W44) DVD videos, English. The series documents the remarkable cultural, and scientific achievements of the Umayyad, Abbasid (and Fatimid Caliphates) and medieval Arab dynasties between the 7th and the 13th centuries.

Discussion and Questions Follow

Wednesday, Sep. 10

The Rise of the Abbasids


Hugh Kennedy, When Baghdad Ruled the Muslim World, 11-50.

Map of the Islamic empire in the Abbasid period (1)
Map of the Islamic empire in the Abbasid period (2)

Week 3

Monday, Sep. 15

The Abbasids: Moshe Sharon, Black Banners from the East, Chapter 4 (pp. 73-100)


Wednesday, Sep. 17

Baghdad: A Golden Age of Arab and Islamic Culture: Gaston Wiet, Baghdad: Metropolis of the Abbasid Caliphate, Chapter 5.

http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/med/wiet.asp

Week 4

Monday, Sep. 22

Library Session

Wednesday, Sep. 24

Library Session


Week 5

Monday, Sep. 29


Baghdad under the Abbasids (depicted by the geographer Yaqut al-Hamawi)
http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/1000baghdad.asp

Wednesday, Oct. 1


Week 6

Monday, Oct. 6

The Prophet’s Night Journey and Ascent into Heaven: the Qur’an and Medieval Mystical and Philosophical Interpretations

1- The Qur’an: Sura 17, *The Night Journey*, verses 1 and 60

2- The Qur’an: Sura 53, *Al-Najm Sura*, verses 13-18


4- Frederick Colby, "The Early Imami Shi‘i Narratives"

Wednesday, Oct. 8

The Abbasid Caliphate as a Figurehead


Week 7

Monday, Oct. 13

Thanksgiving day
Wednesday, Oct. 15  
Submit Primary Source Analysis  
The Struggle between Al-Amin and Al-Ma’mun  
Discussion of al-Tabari’s Account of this Struggle in Class  

Week 8  
Monday, Oct. 20  
Arabic Poetry: Political Dominion as Sexual Domination  
Suzanne Stetkevych, *The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy*, Chapter 5 (pp. 144-179)  

Wednesday, Oct. 22  
A Medieval Scholar in Baghdad: Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and his views on Philosophy and Sufism  

Week 9  
Monday, Oct. 27  
Umayyad Muslim Rule in Spain: Hitti, *The History of the Arabs*, Chapters 34, 35  

Wednesday, Oct. 29  
Umayyad Muslim Rule in Spain: Hitti, *The History of the Arabs*, Chapters 34, 35  

Week 10  
Monday, Nov. 3  
Al-Andalus: Hitti, *The History of the Arabs*, Chapters 36, 37  

Wednesday, Nov. 5  
Reyes de Taifas or Petty States: Hitti, pp. 537-556  

Week 11  
Monday, Nov. 10  
Cordoba in Richard Fletcher, *Moorish Spain*, Chapter 4 (pp. 53-78)  

Wednesday, Nov. 12  
Berbers of North Africa and Puritanical Islamic Movements Moroccan Fundamentalists, Richard Fletcher, Chapter 6, p. 105-130  

Week 12
Monday, Nov. 17  
*Convivencia*, Richard Fletcher, Chapter 7 (pp. 131-156)

Wednesday, Nov. 19  
**Nasrid Dynasty (1232-1492) in Granada**: Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, Ch. 39, 40

*Supplementary*: *The Alhambra and the Reign of Queen Isabella*

*Video*: 55 minutes (available at McGill)

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**Week 13**

Monday, Nov. 24  
Radwa Ashour, *Granda, a Novel*

Wednesday, Nov. 26  
*Radwa Ashour: Granda, a Novel*

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**Week 14**

Monday, Dec. 1  
**Art, Architecture and Music in Muslim Spain**

*An Art of Living: Arab aesthetics in 9th-century Spain*

*Video*: 27 minutes (watched in class)


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Wed. Dec. 3  
Conference—Classes Cancelled

Thurs. Dec. 4  
Revision