

Professor Rula Jurdi Abisaab  
Winter 2019  
Tuesdays 4:05-6:55  
Morrice Hall, Rm. 313  
Office Hrs: Tues. 3:00-4:00 & Fridays 2:30-3:30  
e-mail: [rula.abisaab@mcgill.ca](mailto:rula.abisaab@mcgill.ca)

## **ISLA 430**

### ***Islamdom: From Baghdad to Cordoba***

*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)*

*"All the lands in their diversity are one, and men are all neighbors and brothers"*  
al-Zubaydi, tutor of Caliph al-Hakam II of Cordoba (961-976)

The course explores the formation of medieval Islamic cultures from the 8<sup>th</sup> until the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and the dynamics of state and society, stretching from an urban cosmopolitan center like Baghdad in the Eastern Islamic Lands, to Cordoba in the Western Islamic lands. Emphasis is laid on the political, social-legal, literary, and artistic features of Andalusian societies in Spain, and Abbasid societies in Iraq, Syria and Persia. The course depicts the integration of diverse ethnic groups and religious traditions into the context of a unified Islamic history, and the unfolding of distinct literary and artistic traditions. The course investigates the Hispano-Arabic synthesis and Ideal of Pluralism, or the *Convivencia* in the Iberian Peninsula and challenges posed to it in recent scholarship. The course sheds light on political legitimacy, theological struggles, women and gender in the *harem*, mysticism, and puritanical movements.

*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**

### **Books**

- Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World*. (Purchase it from Paragraphe Bookstore in February)
- Radwa Ashour, *Granada: a Novel*. Syracuse, 2003. (Purchase it from Paragraphe Bookstore in February)
- Olivia R. Constable, *Medieval Iberia: Readings from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Sources*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. (DP97.4 M43 2012) (We need access and permission to a pdf copy)

### **Book Chapters**

- Hugh Kennedy, *When Baghdad Ruled the Muslim World* (Da Capo Press, 2004), 11-50. (We need permission and access to a pdf copy)
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates* (Harlow, 2004), 123-155; 185-243 & 265- 282. (We need permission and access to a pdf copy of it)

### **Articles and Book Chapters Available Online (and through McGill)**

- Al Maggari: Tarik's Address to His Soldiers, 711 CE, from *The Breath of Perfumes* <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/711Tarik1.asp>
- Alastair Northedge, "Creswell, Herzfeld, and Samarra," *Muqarnas* vol. 8, K. A. C. Creswell and His Legacy (1991): 74-93.
- Denis E. McAuley, *Ibn Arabi's Mystical Poetics*, 2012. Available through McGill & DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199659548.001.0001
- John A. Nawas, "A Reexamination of Three Current Explanations for al-Ma'mun's Introduction to the Mihna, *IJMES*," 26 (1994): 615-629.
- Sa`diyya Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn `Arabi, Gender, and Sexuality*
- *Baghdad under the Abbasids* (depicted by the Geographer Yaqut al-Hamawi) <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/1000baghdad.asp>
- Nuha N.N. Khoury, "The Meaning of the Great Mosque of Cordoba in the Tenth Century," *Muqarnas* Vol. 13, No.1 (1996): 80-98.
- D.F. Ruggles, "Arabic Poetry and Architectural Memory in Al-Andalus," *Ars Orientalis*, vol. 23 (1993): 171-178.
- Suzanne Stetkevych, *The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy* (Indiana University Press, 2002), Chapter 5 & 6 (pp. 144-240)

## **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 **2 Students** will be responsible for raising **critical questions on the assigned readings and directing the class discussion**. The rest of the class has to answer these questions as accurately as possible and engage other students in the discussion. *A good part of the grade is placed on whether you have prepared the readings well, and whether your questions touch a core theme or topic in these readings.*

### **Assignments:**

**1-Oral Group Assignment: Primary Source Analysis** due **Tuesday, February 11<sup>th</sup>**. *This is a Group Assignment. Students will be divided into groups and each group (4-5 students) will investigate the 5 questions listed below and come to class fully prepared to address them. You Need to Consult:*

*The History of al-Tabari, vol.31, The War Between Brothers*, translated by Michael Fishbein (NY: SUNY, 1992). It is **On Reserve (3 hours) at the Islamic Studies Library**.

Students in all Groups must read closely the Arabic account (translated into English) 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:

1<sup>st</sup>: 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.

2<sup>nd</sup>: Summarize the main reasons for the conflict between the brothers. There are direct reasons and indirect reasons. Can you think of indirect reasons, which al-Tabari may have alluded to?

3<sup>rd</sup>: Shed light on the way al-Tabari presents al-Amin.

4<sup>th</sup>: Shed light on the way al-Tabari presents al-Ma'mun. Does he express certain preferences or biases in support of one or the other?

5<sup>th</sup>: How does al-Tabari presents the multifaceted features of their struggle or how does he approach the contradictory views on it and on the brothers themselves.

In order to complete these sections of your group assignment, **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.**

I will evaluate your **Group Output** in terms of effort, extent of knowledge, analytical skills, and precision. You will get a **unified Group Grade**.

**2- A Final Paper of 12-15 pages long due April 12, the last day of classes.** By early **March** 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 major 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*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn., St. Martin's Press, 2004, 77-134. A copy of it is available at the Reserve Desk at the Islamic Library.

### Grade Division:

- **Class attendance** (15%)
- **Active Participation** (30%): 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.
- **Oral Group Assignment: Primary Source Analysis** (20%)
- **Final Paper** (35%)

### Week 1 Jan 7-11

Introduction to the Course

### Week 2 Jan 14-18

***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 7<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### Week 3 Jan 21-25

**Submit in Writing the Answers to the Films.** The Questions are: 1- What does the Koran of Uthman refer to? 2- Where was Baghdad Built and how would you describe its cultural,

linguistic, and religious diversity? 3- What were the major institutions of rule and order in Baghdad? 4- What was the House of Wisdom and who built it?

**Readings:** 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 4**

**Jan 28-feb 1**

#### **The Abbasid Caliphs: Political Legitimacy and ‘Orthodoxy’**

**Readings:**

- Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, 123-155, 185-243 and 265-282.
- John A. Nawas, “A Reexamination of Three Current Explanations for al-Ma’mun’s Introduction of the Mihna,” *IJMES*, 26 (1994): 615-629.

#### **Week 5**

**Feb 4-8**

#### **Society, Gender, and Literary Life among the Abbasid Elites**

**Readings:**

- S. Stetkevych, *The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy*, Chapters 5 and 6 (pp. 144-240). (Poetic vs Sexual Domination and The Poetics of Political Allegiance)
- Hugh Kennedy, “The Harem,” *When Baghdad Ruled the Muslim World*, 160-199.
- Nadia El Cheikh, “Gender and Politics in the Harem of al-Muqtadir,” *Gender in the Early Medieval World*, eds. L. Brubaker and Julia Smith (Cambridge, 2004), 147-161.

#### **Week 6**

**Feb 11-15**

**Oral Group Assignment: Primary Source Analysis (Tuesday Feb. 11<sup>th</sup>) on the Struggle between Al-Amin and Al-Ma’mun.**

#### **Week 7**

**Feb 18-22**

#### **Medieval Spain: Constructing “Convivencia”**

**Readings**

- Maria Menocal, *Ornament of the World*, pp. 3-146
- Al Maggari: Tarik's Address to His Soldiers, 711 CE, from *The Breath of Perfumes* <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/711Tarik1.asp>

#### **Week 8**

**Feb 25-march 1**

#### **Medieval Spain: Constructing “Convivencia”**

**Readings:** Maria Rosa Menocal, *Ornament of the World*, pp. 147-End

**Week 9**  
**Spring Break, March 4-8**

**Week 10**  
**March 11-15**

**Al-Andalus, 9th-11th Century**

**Muslim Arrival (8<sup>th</sup> Century), the Umayyads (9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> Century), and the Taifa Period (11<sup>th</sup> Century)**

**Readings:** Constable, *Medieval Iberia*, 2nd Edition. chapters: 7, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29, 31, 33, 36.

{This work sheds light on court politics, uprisings, theological debates, elite women, Muslim-Jewish-Christian relations, and literary achievements in al-Andalus. The sources were translated into English from Arabic, Hebrew, Latin, and Castilian. }

**Week 11**  
**March 18-22**

**Al-Andalus: Mysticism and Islamic Puritanism**  
**The Period of the Almoravids & Almohads (12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> Century)**

**Readings:**

Constable, *Medieval Iberia*, Start on Page 225 and Cover Chapters 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 47.

**Sufism, Social Norms, and Gender: Ibn `Arabi**

**Readings:**

- Denis E. McAuley, *Ibn `Arabi's Mystical Poetics*, chapter 1 (pp.12-33).
- Sa'diya Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy*, chapter 3.

**Week 12**  
**March 25-29**

**The Reconquista (13<sup>th</sup> Century) and Christian Spain (12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> Century)**

**Readings:** Constable, *Medieval Iberia*, pp. 48, 51, 53, 54, 55, 61, 65, 66, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88.

**Week 13**  
**April 1-5**

Radwa Ashour, *Granada, a Novel*

**Week 14**  
**April 8-12**

**Architecture, Memory, and Meaning in Baghdad & Cordoba**

**Readings:**

- Alastair Northedge, "Creswell, Herzfeld, and Samarra".
- *Baghdad under the Abbasids* (depicted by the geographer Yaqut al-Hamawi)  
<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/1000baghdad.asp>

- Nuha N.N. Khoury, "The Meaning of the Great Mosque of Cordoba in the Tenth Century," *Muqarnas* 13 (1996): 80-98.
- D.F. Ruggles, "Arabic Poetry and Architectural Memory in Al-Andalus," *Ars Orientalis*, vol. 23 (1993): 171-178.

*Supplementary Audio-Visual Materials:*

**An Art of Living: Arab aesthetics in 9<sup>th</sup>-century Spain**

Video- 27 minutes

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

Video-55 minutes (available at McGill)