The ‘city’ and ‘religion’ have a long and rich history in scholarship in, of, and about the Middle East, ranging from early articulations of the ‘Islamic city’ to more recent engagements with questions of politics, urban life, everyday experience, and governance. Yet despite a shared interest in the place of religion in the city, scholars often operate from quite distinct methodological, conceptual, and epistemological positions. In this talk, I identify four meta-questions that underpin much of this scholarship: (1) How do we conceptualize ‘religion’ and the ‘city’ as linked objects of study? (2) How and why do we think about religious difference within and between cities? (3) Is there a single urban process? (4) And what are the advantages and disadvantages of framing our work as a regional analysis of the Middle East?

Paying greater attention to these questions provides an opportunity to revisit – and perhaps reframe – the unacknowledged assumptions that tend to structure our research questions, methods, disciplinary approaches, and findings. Indeed, I use the talk to suggest that beginning from these questions opens up new opportunities for an expanded interdisciplinary exchange. In the process, we might develop new opportunities for more responsive, reflexive, and responsible approaches to studying religion in, of, and from the city.