

SYLLABUS FOR HIST 331/531 - EARLY ISLAMIC HISTORY: A SURVEY
Spring 2022

Time and venue: Friday, 9:40-12:30, FASS G022

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Office hours: Friday, 13:00-14:00 and by appointment

Zoom room for hybrid format: <https://sabanciuniv.zoom.us/j/92073776001>, Meeting ID: 920 7377 6001

This course intended for undergraduate and graduate students surveys the history of Islam from its inception in Late Antiquity in the seventh to the fragmentation of the caliphate and the fundamental changes in notions of authority in the tenth century. In addition to political history, it will treat subjects including theology, law, literature, art, etc. Aside from the traditional narrative about Islamic historiography also inherent in modern treatments, we will engage with some of the more recent, so-called “revisionist” scholarship on the subject. In addition to the study of Islamic history, students will also have the opportunity to learn ways as to how read critically, and how to engage with historical or religious sources. We will also address such “big questions” as the relationship between reason and belief, state and religion, as well as what actually Islam is, or how to conceptualize the relationship between diverse faiths and civilizations.

The course will be divided into two units, separated by a midterm exam. The first unit will proceed chronologically, discussing the formation of Islam against the background of processes of a world historical magnitude and the evolution of the Muslim community and the challenges it faced both internally and externally from the beginnings to the tenth century.

Class set-up: Lecture and discussion

Weekly Assignments: To prepare for lectures and discussions, students are expected to complete the assigned readings in advance of the class meeting where they are mentioned on the Course Schedule. To facilitate the students’ engagement with the reading assignments, they are required to reflect on them on the Class Discussion Forum by 12:00 a.m. on the day of the class at the latest. In their written comments on SuCourse, they can also ask questions about the readings and bring those questions to class, where we will discuss some of them.

Evaluation: For undergraduates: Mid-term (30%), Final (50%), weekly assignments (20%).

Graduates: Mid-term (20%), Final (35%), a research paper on a subject to be developed in conversation with the instructor (35%), Weekly assignments (10%).

The two exams are comprised of (1) a quiz on the primary concepts, events, persona discussed in class, and (2) a take-home essay assignment, in which students have to demonstrate how well they have understood the basic historical processes and the larger framework outlined during the course.

Attendance: This is a difficult course. There are many names and concepts to understand, contextualize and remember. Classes are intended to help you conceptualize and structure

these data, making preparation for the exams easier. Therefore, regular attendance is essential for good performance.

What to do during class? Well, take notes! By structuring what you hear during lecture or discussion on a piece of paper, you have already started absorbing the material. I also recommend that you take handwritten notes instead of using a computer. Here are some articles that make the case for banning laptops in classrooms:

<https://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/the-case-for-banning-laptops-in-the-classroom>,
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/memory-medic/201303/why-writing-hand-could-make-you-smarter>,

<https://www.vox.com/2014/6/4/5776804/note-taking-by-hand-versus-laptop>,

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/>.

Reading assignments: There are reading assignments both from primary and from secondary sources. Primary materials will include excerpts from chronicles, the Qur'an, hadith, etc. I suggest you print out the primary reading and bring it to class. It is much more difficult to make notes into it, underline, etc. on the computer screen. Primary sources are just as essential a part of the course material as secondary readings from the text books and lecture notes and presentations.

Device policy: Please do not use your electronic devices, mobile phones, laptops, etc. in class other than for taking notes or, unless you print out the readings, for consulting course materials. Not only is it disrespectful to the instructor to check your Facebook or Instagram while he or she is lecturing, but you are also doing yourselves a disservice, since the exams will be based on what we talk about in class.

N.B. This syllabus is subject to change! Students are responsible to follow announcements in class, on SuCourse+ and via email for any adjustments to the readings or course schedule. Indeed, the reading list below will be complemented with further short excerpts from primary sources as the course progresses. It also lists separately readings under the heading "HIST 531" that are mandatory only for graduate students.

1. March 4: Introduction and organizational meeting, key concepts, framework for periodization, Islam in world history

Arabia and the Middle East in Late Antiquity

Fred M. Donner, "The Historian, the Believer, and the Qur'an," in Gabriel S. Reynolds (ed.), *New Perspectives on the Qur'an: The Qur'an in its Historical Context* (London, Routledge, 2011), 25-37.

Hugh N. Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East From the Sixth to the Eleventh Century* (London; New York: Longman, 1986), 1-14.

HIST 531:

Marshall G.S Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), vol. 1, 71-145.

Frank Griffel, “Contradictions and Lots of Ambiguity: Two New Perspectives on Premodern (and Postclassical) Islamic Societies,” *Bustan: The Middle East Book Review* 8, No. 1 (2017): 1–21.

Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam?: The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), chapter 1.

2. March 11: Muhammad and the early polity

Kennedy, 15-49.

Fred Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: at the origins of Islam* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), 2010, 1-38.

HIST 531:

Hodgson, vol. 1, 146-186.

Fred McGraw Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 39-89.

3. March 18: The Qur’an

Qur’an, Suras 12, 73-74, 81-112 (for the Meccan period); Suras 5, 33, 48 (107-126, 419-428, 518-522) (for the Medinan period)

Michael Cook, *The Koran, a Very Short Introduction* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 117-148.

HIST 531:

Gabriel S. Reynolds, “Introduction,” in *The Qur’ān in its Historical Context*, ed. Gabriel S. Reynolds (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 1-25.

Fred Donner, “The Qur’ān in Recent Scholarship—Challenges and Desiderata.” *ibid*, 29-50.

Gerhard Böwering, “Recent Research on the Construction of the Qur’ān.” *ibid.*, 70-87.

4. March 25: The Rashidun, Conquests and Civil Wars

Kennedy, 50-81.

Primary sources: The Constitution of Medina, Baladhuri on the Arab Conquests, The Pact of 'Umar, The Fiscal Rescript of 'Umar II

HIST 531: Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 90-193.

5. April 1: The late Umayyads and the Abbasid “Revolution”

Kennedy, 82-133.

HIST 531: Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 194-224.

6. April 8: Abbasid absolutism

Kennedy, 133-199.

Primary sources: Barmakids, The Trial (Mihna) over the Createdness of the Qur'an; A Shu'ubi Poem

HIST 531: Hodgson, 280-314

7. April 15: The dissolution of caliphal authority and the “Shiite century”

Kennedy, 200-249

HIST 531: Kennedy, 250-345.

8. April 22: Mid-term

9. April 29: Economy, social order, political thought

Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), 98-129.

Ira M Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 31-44.

Primary sources: Last Umayyads, ‘Abd al-Hamid, Abu Yusuf

HIST 531: Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East* (New York and Oxford, 1990), 3-15.

Jonathan P. Berkey, *The Formation of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 159-176).

10. May 6: Law

Wael B. Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), chapters 1-5.

Primary sources: Shaybani, Malik, Shafi‘i

11. May 13: Personal piety: Sunnism, Shiism, Mysticism

Jonathan P. Berkey, *The Formation of Islam* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), 130-158.

Primary sources: The Ascension of Abu Yazid al-Bistami; Hallaj: The Sufi Martyr; Hallaj: Anecdotes

HIST 531: Hodgson, 359-409.

12. May 27: Speculation: Philosophy and Theology

Majid Fakhry, *A Short Introduction to Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism* (Oxford, England; Rockport, MA, USA: Oneworld, 1997), 1-68.

HIST 531: Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ‘Abbāsid Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th Centuries)* (London; New York: Routledge, 1998), 28-60.

Hodgson, 410-443.

13. June 3: Literary culture, the arts and architecture

Primary sources: Ibn al-Muqaffa‘, Jahiz, Ibn al-Nadim

HIST 531: Hodgson, *Venture*, 444-472; Arberry, A. J. (Arthur John). *The Seven Odes: The First Chapter in Arabic Literature*. London: New York: G. Allen & Unwin ; Macmillan, 1957, the first ode.

Ettinghausen, Richard, Oleg Grabar, and Marilyn Jenkins. *Islamic Art and Architecture 650-1250*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001, 15-79.

14. June 10: Historiography, Conclusion

Stephen R. Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991, 70-103.