

Attention!

This is a representative syllabus. The syllabus for the course you are enrolled in will likely be different.

Please refer to your instructor's syllabus for more information on specific requirements for a given semester.

*Cultural Currents of Late Antique Middle East:
The Arabs, the Byzantines & the Sasanians*

NEEC 7402

During the past few decades a growing trend in Islamic studies has sought to contextualize the rise of Islam in terms of the cultural and historical currents of the Middle East during the Late Antique period. The nexus that Mecca and Medina and various other Arab communities in Syria, Yemen, Mesopotamia, and the Persian Gulf established with each other as well as other communities within the Byzantine and Sasanian empires of Late Antiquity have increasingly come under scrutiny in this scholarship. What were the cultural currents of the Mediterranean world of Late Antiquity? What were the consequences of monotheism in the Late Antique world and how can one contextualize the rise of Islam within it? How did Christian Byzantium view the rise of Islam and what relationship did it have with various Arab communities within and without it? What were the interrelations between various Christian communities, including the Nestorian, and various Jewish communities, to the Meccan and Medinan society? How extensive were cultural contacts amongst these? Was there an “Iranian factor” in Byzantium, and how did the Iranian world and the Sasanian Empire partake in the cultural currents of the Late Antique Middle East? How extensive were the Sasanians’ relationship with Yemen, Arabia and Byzantium during this period of history? Besides a Judeo-Christian and Byzantine context, can one envision an Iranian context to the rise of Islam and the cultural and historical currents which informed it? Tapping on the primary sources for investigating these questions pertaining to early Islamic cultural history, and delving into the contemporary scholarship that has sought to answer these, this course aims at providing a cultural and historical context for the rise of Islam in the Late Antique Middle East.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: The format of this course is that of a seminar with extensive weekly reading. The attendance and participation of the students in this course is therefore mandatory. Students are expected to provide a one-two page critical review of the assigned readings for the course on a weekly basis and share these with the class, through electronic mail, the day before the class meets. These weekly reviews and your attendance and degree of participation will account for %50 of your final grade for the course. A final term-paper, based partially on primary sources, will be due at the end of the term. In consultation with me, you are expected to have decided on the topic of your research by week VII, and provided a preliminary bibliography by week IX. The last session of the class will be devoted to your presentations of your research. The term paper will account for the remaining %50 of your grade.

This syllabus is subject to change based on my assessment of potential weaknesses and voids in the background of students enrolled in it, and your collective input.

REQUIRED READINGS: The following books and articles will form part of your required reading. It is essential that you begin ordering these well in advance of the date due to for their discussion. Other material, including articles listed in the syllabus, and possibly some of the assigned books, will be made available through Carmen.

G. Fisher, *Between Empires: Arabs, Romans, and Sasanians in Late Antiquity* (Oxford Classical Monographs), Oxford University Press, USA (June 11, 2011)

R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam), (Princeton, NJ.: The Darwin Press, 1998.)

R. Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle: And the Circulation of Historical Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Liverpool University Press - Translated Texts for Historians, (December 15, 2011).

H. Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century*, (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2010.)

N. Khalek, *Damascus after the Muslim Conquest: Text and Image in Early Islam* [Hardcover], Oxford University Press, USA (September 16, 2011)

Anonym, *Khuzistan Chronicle*, Ignazio Guidi, "Un nuovo testo siriano sulla storia degli ultimi Sassanidi," in *Actes du Huitième Congrès International des Orientalistes, tenu en 1899 à Stockholm et à Christiana I: Section sémitique* (B), Leiden, 1893, pp. 3-36; repr., with Latin translation, as "Chronicom anonymum" in *Chronica Minora I*, CSCO 1-2, Paris 1903; repr. Louvain, 1955-60, pp. 15-39 (text), pp. 15-32 (translation).

P. Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire*, I. B. Tauris, London, 2008.

Pseudo-Sebeos, *Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, two volumes, Translated Texts for Historians, (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2000).

Tabari, *The History of Al-Tabari: The Battle of Al-Qadisiyyah and the Conquest of Syria and Palestine* (Sury Series in Near Eastern Studies), State University of New York Press (September 20, 1991)

Tabari, *The History of Al-Tabari: The Challenge to the Empires* (Sury Series in Near Eastern Studies)

Pseudo-Waqidi, *The Islamic Conquest of Syria: A translation of Futuh al-Sham*, Mawlana Sulayman al-Kindi translated, n.d.

Tabari, *The History of Al-Tabari: The Sasanids, the Byzantines, the Lakhmids*, SUNY, New York, 1999.

Syllabus

- Week 1:** **Introduction, Structure of the Course, Requirements**
(Weekly Reviews of Readings, Attendance and a Final Primary Source- Based Research Paper of 20-30 pages)
- Week II:** **Foreign Sources for Early Islam**
Readings:
- R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam), (Princeton, NJ.: The Darwin Press, 1998.) Online Distribution.
- Week III:** **Foreign Sources for Early Islam II**
Readings:
- H. Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century*, (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2010.) Available on Carmen.
- Week IV:** **Foreign Sources for Early Islam and Conquests: Armenian**
Readings:
- Pseudo-Sebeos, *Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, two volumes, Translated Texts for Historians, (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2000). Available on Carmen.
- Week V:** **Arabic Sources on Early Islam: Syria and Conquests**
Readings:
- Pseudo-Waqidi, *The Islamic Conquest of Syria: A translation of Futuh al-Sham*, Mawlana Sulayman al-Kindi translated, n.d. Available on Carmen.
- Week VI:** **Sasanian Empire and Conquest**
Readings:
- P. Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire*, Introduction plus chapters I-4, pp. 1-313.

Week VII: Sasanian Empire and Conquest and Religion

Readings:

P. Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire*, chapters 5-7, pp. 313-459.

Week VIII: Sasanian Empire and Conquest III

Readings:

Anonym, *Khuzistan Chronicle*,

Chase Robinson, "The Conquest of Khuzistan: A Historiographical Reassessment," in Lawrence I. Conrad, ed., *History and Historiography in Early Islamic Times*, Princeton, New Jersey

Hoyland *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle: And the Circulation of Historical Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Liverpool University Press - Translated Texts for Historians, (December 15, 2011).

Week IX: Pre-Islamic Arabs

Readings:

G. Fisher *Between Empires: Arabs, Romans, and Sasanians in Late Antiquity* (Oxford Classical Monographs), Oxford University Press, USA (June 11, 2011)

Week X: Syria and the Conquests Continued II

Readings:

N. Khalek *Damascus after the Muslim Conquest: Text and Image in Early Islam* [Hardcover], Oxford University Press, USA (September 16, 2011)

Week XI: Syria and the Conquests III

Readings:

Tabari, *The History of Al-Tabari: The Battle of Al-Qadisiyyah and the Conquest of Syria and Palestine* (Suny Series in Near Eastern Studies), State University of New York Press (September 20, 1991)

Week XII: History and Historiography of Syria

Readings:

- Tabari, *The History of Al-Tabari: The Challenge to the Empires* (Sunny Series in Near Eastern Studies)
- A. Noth, "Futuh History and Futuh Historiography: The Muslim Conquest of Damascus," in *al-Qantara* 10 (1989), pp. 453-462.
- A. Elad, "The Beginnings of Historical Writing by the Arabs: the Earliest Syrian Writers of the Arab Conquests."
- F. M. Donner, "The Problem of Early Arabic Historiography in Syria," in *Bilad al-Sham fi sadr al-Islam*, 24-30 (1987), pp. 1-27.

Week XIII: History and Historiography of Syria II

Readings:

- M. Lecker, "Heraclius and the Hijra," Personal preprint from the author, Distributed Electronically.
- P. Pourshariati, "Mihrans and Islamic Dogma," Distributed Electronically.
- Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, sections on Syria
- A. Noth, "Futuh History and Futuh Historiography: The Muslim Conquest of Damascus," *al-Qantara* 10, 1989, 453-462. Available on Carmen
- S. Mourad, "On Early Islamic Historiography, Abu Isma'il al-Azdi and his Futuh al-Sham," *JAOS* 120, pp. 577-593.
- J. Starr, "Byzantine Jewry on Eve of Arab Conquest," *Journal of Palestine Oriental Society*, Vol. 15,
- E. Horowitz, "The Vengeance of the Jews Was stronger than their Avarice: Modern Historians and the Persian Conquest of Jerusalem in 614," *Jewish Social Studies*, New Series, vol. 4., No. 2, pp. 1-39. Available on Carmen.
- B. Wheeler, "Imagining the Sasanian Capture of Jerusalem: The Prophecy and Dream of Zerubabel," *Orientalia Christiania*, vol. 57, no. 1, pp. 69-85.

Week XIV Material Culture of Early Islam:

Guest Appearance of Professor Stefan Heidemann, University of Hamburg (through Skype)

Readings:

- S. Leder, "The Attitude of the Population, especially the Jews, Towards Arab-Islamic Conquest of Bilad al-Sham ..." *Die Welt des Orients*, BD 18 (1987), pp. 74-71.
- S. Heidemann, "The evolving Representation of the early Islamic Empire and its Religion on Coin Imagery, in *The Qur'an in Context* Angelika Neuwirth et. Al edited, Brill 2010.
- J. Johns, "Archeology and History of Early Islam: The First Seventy Years," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 46, no. 4.
- H. Gaube, "Arabs in Sixth-Century Syria: Some Archaeological Observations," *Bulletin of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2. (1981), pp. 93-98.
- C. Foss, "Syria in Transition, AD 550-750: An Archaeological Approach"
- S. Heidemann, "Numismatics," pp. 648-663, in *The New Cambridge History of Islam: Vol. 1: The Formation of the Islamic World Sixth to Eleventh Centuries*, Chase Robinson ed., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- M. Bates, "History, Geography, and Numismatics in the First Century of Islamic Coinage," pp. 1-35.
- D. Wasserstein, "Coins as Agents of Cultural Definition in Islam," in *Poetic Today*, Vol. 14, n. 2, 1993, pp. 303-322.

Week XV:**Presentation on Paper Topics and Concluding Remarks**