SYLLABUS

(1) Course Description

Islam emerged in the Middle East in the 800s C.E. as an imperial religion, conceived as superior to Judaism and Christianity. It was the state religion of the Abbasid Empire until its fall 1258. Thereafter it formed the core of Islamic Civilization which extended from the Iberian Peninsula in the west to Central Asia and India in the east. After 1300, the dominant state in the Middle East was the Ottoman Empire, the main Islamic competitor of Christian Europe for control of Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean Sea until the eighteenth century, when it began to suffer from political decentralization. At the time of its greatest efflorescence (800-1300), Islamic Civilization was the embodiment of the philosophical and scientific heritage of Antiquity and contributed substantially to the advancement of mathematics and astronomy.

(2) Course Objectives

This introductory survey of classical Islamic history of the Middle East seeks to familiarize you with the basic historical and cultural developments of this crucial region of the world. There are two parts to this course: formation of Islamic civilization under the aegis of the Arabs and competition between the Ottoman Empire and Europe for dominance in Europe and the Mediterranean. In both parts you are asked to reflect on the idea that much of Western Christian civilization is built on the achievements of Islamic civilization.

You will learn the basic methodologies of historical research pertaining to the Middle East. The course contains a writing requirement and asks you to hone your abilities of composition, historical explanation, narration, and coherent argumentation.

(3) Learning Objectives

- Identify the key events which express/define change over time in a particular place or region and how change occurs over time.
- Interpret the complexity and diversity of situations, events and past mentalities.
- Analyze cause-and-effect relations and multiple causations.
- Write a well-organized historical argument.

(4) Course Requirements

In order to pass this course you will have to take four exams:
• In-class exam of about 15 min. length (one short essay answer and two pages of multiple choice questions), Monday, Sep. 12. Value: 15% of final grade.
• Mid-term paper on a topic from a list (five pages length), deadline Monday, Oct. 3, 11:59 pm. Value: 20% of final grade. Paper to be submitted to Turnitin via Canvas.
• In-class exam of about 15 min. length (one short essay answer and two pages of multiple choice questions), Monday, Nov. 14. Value: 15% of final grade.
• Final Exam (two essay answers of ca. one and a half page in a large blue book and 3 short essay questions. Tuesday, Dec. 13, 10:30-12:30. Value: 40% of final grade.

Please check the Canvas site regularly for instructions concerning the exams and reading materials.

(b) There is one basic text assigned to this course: Ira Lapidus, History of Islamic Societies, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). Lecture topics and assigned book chapters do not always coincide and you need to reread chapters or portions of chapters for some lectures.

(c) To keep everything on track and avoid time-consuming additional administrative work I require that you adhere to all deadlines punctually and completely. If you miss an exam without prior excuse I will record an E. If you fall sick and are unable to notify me, I require a doctor’s attestation.

(d) According to the University regulation 6-100-III-O, your regular class attendance throughout the semester is mandatory. Please make it your habit to come punctually every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. You will not be able to make up for missed classes from the readings alone since the emphasis in this course is on analysis and contextual explanation, not on repetition of reading materials.

(e) If you miss class meetings repeatedly and unexcused (I will keep tabs on absences) your class grade will be lowered to C or less. Smartphones must be turned off and kept in your bag or pocket during class. The use of laptops and notebooks is permitted but I expect on your honor that you will use them for note-taking only.

(f) This course will not be easy. It is possible that even though you are working hard some confusion and disorientation may remain. If your grade is low consultation with me is mandatory; I will ask you to come see me in my office or make some other arrangements so that I can help you to pass this course.

(f) Contact
Phone: 801-581-8073
Office: 311 CTIHB (Tanner Irish Bldg.)
Office hours: Monday, 1:30-2:30 and by appointment
Email: peter.vonsivers@utah.edu
(5) Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

Note: All readings are to be completed on the weekend prior to the week for which they are listed.

Part 1 – The Formation of Classical Islamic Civilization

Week 1, Lectures 1-3 – Rome, Persia, and the Arabs
Lapidus, Introduction and Chs. 1 and 3

Week 2, Lectures 4-6 – The Arab Conquests
Chs. 6, 7, and 8

Week 3, Lectures 7-8 – The Abbasid-Muslim Empire
Ch. 9 and 10

First Test, Mon., Sep. 12

Week 4, Lectures 9-11 – Abbasid Culture
Chs. 12, 13, and 15

Week 5, Lectures 12-14 – Abbasid Trade
TBA (Canvas)

Week 6, Lectures 15-17 – The Fatimid Counter-Caliphate
Chs. 16, 20 and 26

Midterm Paper, Mon., Oct. 3

Week 7, Lectures 18-20 – The Crusades and Muslim Recovery
Ch. 20

Week 8 – Fall Break

Week 9, Lectures 21-23 – The Mamluk-Mongol Struggle for the Middle East
Ch. 20

Week 10, Lectures 24-26 – Islamic Iberia and Christian Expansion
Ch. 27

Part 2 – Islamic Civilization Under the Ottoman and Safavid Empires

Week 11, Lectures 27-29 – Ottoman Origins
Ch. 31

Week 12, Lectures 30-32 – The Safavids
Ch. 34

Week 13, Lectures 33-35 – Ottoman Expansion by Land and Sea
Ch. 33

**Second Test, Mon., Nov. 14**

Week 14, Lectures 36-38 – Imperial Apogee
Ch. 32
Week 15, Lectures 39-40 – Holding On to the Empire
TBA (Canvas)
Week 16, Lectures 41-43 – Decentralization
TBA (Canvas)

**Final Exam, Tues., Dec. 13, 10:30-12:30**

**Note 1:** Needless to say, you are expected to be the sole author of all written work you submit in this class. Please inform yourself about the definition of plagiarism, ghostwriting, and their legal consequences in the University Regulations: Policy 6-400: Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities (“Student Code”).

**Note 2:** The University of Utah requires that the following paragraph be added to this syllabus. “The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in the class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Services, 162 Union Building, 581-5020 (V/TDD). CDS will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations ([www.hr.utah.edu/oeo/ada/guide/faculty/](http://www.hr.utah.edu/oeo/ada/guide/faculty/)).”

**Note 3:** The University of Utah requires that the following paragraph be added to this syllabus. “Some of the readings, lectures, films, or presentations in this course may include material that may conflict with the core beliefs of some students. Please review the syllabus carefully to see if the course is one that you are committed to taking. If you have a concern, please discuss it with me at your earliest convenience.” For more information, please consult the University of Utah’s Accommodations Policy, which appears at: [www.admin.utah.edu/facdev/accommodations-policy.pdf](http://www.admin.utah.edu/facdev/accommodations-policy.pdf).