

Syllabus

Arab-Islamic History - From Tribes to Empires

Prof. Miri Shefer-Mossensohn

About this course

Learn about the history of the Arab and Muslim world during its first millennium, including political, social and cultural aspects. You will study this course in two parts. The first presents the main political events that set the chronological framework for the course, namely 6th century to the arrival of the Ottomans in the Middle East in the beginning of the 16th century. The second part delves into social and cultural realities of the medieval Middle East.

[A short video on the course](#)

This is an on-line course on Campus IL platform. There is also an [English version on edX](#). The course offers a novel learning experience, which allows the student to determine her or his own pace, and combines several mediums: pre-recorded short lectures, interviews, short readings from primary and secondary sources, and discussion questions. The videos are offered in English, with Hebrew and Arabic subtitles.

Assignments and final grade

During the course you will be required to submit 8 assignments (quizzes) worth 60% of the final grade (each assignment is worth 7.5%). The final test will be a multiple-choice test on Campus IL platform, worth 40% of the final grade.

List of Topics:

Part A – The Political Framework: 1000 Years of Islamic History (500-1500)

Lesson 1: Early Islamic Arabia

- Pre-Islamic Arabia: The Local Scene

- Pre-Islamic Arabia: The Regional Scene
- Muhammad: The Individual
- Muhammad: The Community Leader
- 🗨 Interview with Dr Leah Kinberg: Early Islam and Its Sources
- 🔍 Historian's Lab: The hadith on opening Muhammad's breast/belly
- ❓ Quiz lesson 1

Lesson 2: The First Muslim States – The Rashidun & Umayyads

- The Transition Period after Muhammad's Death
- Rashidun: The "Rightly Guided" Caliphs and the First Islamic State
- The Umayyad Dynasty
- The early Territorial Expansion
- Early Islamic bureaucracy
- 🗨 Interview with Prof. Gideon Avni: Space and Rulership in the Early Islamic States
- Early Islamic Identity
- 🗨 Interview with Dr. Raquel Ukeles: The Canonization of Qur'an – The Material Aspects
- 🔍 Historian's Lab – The Assassination of the Third Caliph: Reading in an Arab-Islamic Chronicle
- ❓ Quiz lesson 2

Lesson 3: The Abbasids - When Baghdad and the Arabs Ruled the World

- The Abbasid Coming to Power
- The advent of concubines and the creation of the harem
- The bureaucracy
- 🔍 Historian's Lab: The Abbasid Harem – The View from Within
- Decentralization and the meaning of sovereignty
- The Limits of Abbasid Rule: the Buyhids and the Seljuks
- Threats on Abbasid Legitimation: The Umayyads in Iberia and the Fatimids in North Africa to Syria
- 🗨 Interview with Prof. Amira Bennison: A Discussion about Abbasid North Africa and Islamic Iberia

- The Crusades and the Rise of Saladin
- ② Quiz lesson 3

Lesson 4: Turkic Peoples in the Pre-Modern Islamic World

- Acquaintance with the Turkic Peoples
- The Turkish Makeover: From Slaves to Rulers
- The Seljuk State: Changes and Legacies
- 🔍 Historian's Lab: Reconstructing Everyday Realities from Poetry and Artefacts
- The Birth of "Turkey"
- The Mamluk Sultanate: Military Slaves turned Sultans
- 💬 Interview with Dr. Daniella Talmon-Heller: A Discussion about Popular Culture and Mystical Islam
- The Mamluk Sultanate: The End
- 💬 Interview with Prof. Nükhet Varlık: The End of the Mamluks and the Advent of the Ottomans
- ② Quiz lesson 4

Lesson 5: The Mongols and the Post-Mongol Islamic world, 13th-16th centuries

- The Beginning of the Muslim-Mongol Relations
- 💬 Interview with Prof. Michal Biran: The Mongol Conquest and Its Long-term Legacies
- Mongol Influences on the Middle East: The Establishment of the Mamluk Sultanate, 1250-1517
- Mongol Influences: The Muslim-Mongol Dynasties
- 🔍 Historian's Lab: Monuments that speak: Central Asian material culture
- Part A Wrap Up: The Political Framework of the Rise of Muslim States and Empires
- ② Quiz lesson 5

Part B – Environment, Religious and Cultural identities

Lesson 6: Environments, Societies, Individuals

- Typology of Urban Settlements in the Medieval Middle East
- 🗨 Interview with Prof. Gideon Avni: The Changing Landscape and Settlements of the Middle East
- Philanthropy and its Importance in an Urban Setting
- Social Urban Institutions: Mosques and Hammams
- The Legal Systems of an Urban Community
- 🔍 Historian's Lab: A View from the Outside – An Iranian Traveler Describes Muslim Settlement
- ❓ Quiz lesson 6

Lesson 7: Religious Identities in the Middle East: Islam, Christianity, and Judaism

- The Religious Mosaic of the Middle East
- The Formation of the Shiites: A Three-hundred Years Process
- 🔍 Historian's Lab: The Shiite Concept of Rulership
- Christians and Jews: Theology and Legal Status
- 🗨 Interview with Prof. Nasir Basal: Judaism under Islam
- The Everyday Realities of Non-Muslims in the Middle East
- Jerusalem: The Islamic Perspective
- Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Middle East
- ❓ Quiz lesson 7

Lesson 8: Cultural Identities in the Middle East

- Cultural Identities in the Middle East
- Arab Identity: Shared experience, a local specific experience
- Arab culture: Orality and written language
- 🗨 Interview with Dr. Raquel Ukeles: Visual and Material Aspects of Arabic Language and Writing
- Persian-Muslim Culture
- 🔍 Historian's Lab: Exploring Persian Miniatures
- The Translation Project

- The Islamicate Culture
- 🗨 Interview with Prof. Nasir Basal: Judeo-Arabic Language and Literature
- ❓ Quiz lesson 8
- 📝 **Final exam**
- Course Wrap Up

Final historian's Lab – Khirbat al-Mafjar

- Historical background
- Umayyad Construction
- Research Assignment
- Tour of the Site