

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.

NELC 7501 - *Narratives of Islamic Origins*

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The Islamic conquests that swept across the Near East, North Africa, and Central Asia in the seventh and eighth centuries CE remain one of history's most transformative events. But what was it like to witness, experience, and participate in the early Islamic conquests? How did the Muslim conquerors justify their newfound dominion and how did their imperial ambitions shape the trajectory of early Islamic religion and its diverse expressions? Utilizing new historical methods for reading and interpreting the sparse contemporary and near-contemporary testimonies for this historical period, this course explore how these testimonies, both Muslim and non-Muslim, continue to challenge historians to revise the history of the Islamic conquests. Strong focus is placed on reading primary source materials.

INSTRUCTOR

OFFICE

HOURS

EMAIL

TWITTER

Textbooks for Purchase

Michael Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims: A Sourcebook of the Earliest Syriac Writings on Islam* (Berkeley, 2015) ISBN: 978-0520284944

Andrew Palmer, *The Seventh Century in West Syrian Chronicles* (Liverpool, 1993) ISBN: 978-0853232384

CLASS SCHEDULE

SESSION 1 - Jan 9

The Study of Islamic Origins

READINGS:

- Chase Robinson, 'Crone and the end of Orientalism', in *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts*, ed. B. Sadeghi, A.Q. Ahmed, A. Silverstein, and R. Hoyland (Leiden, 2015), 597-620.
- Michael Bonner, "The Legacy and Influence of Patricia Crone (1945-2015)," *Der Islam* (2016): 349-369.
- Patricia Crone, "How the Field Has Changed in My Lifetime," in *Collected Studies, vol. 3: Islam, the Ancient Near East and Varieties of Godlessness*, ed. Hanna Siurua (Leiden, 2016), 239-46.

Jan 16 - MLK DAY No Classes

SESSION 2 - Jan 23

Three Early Testimonies to Muḥammad

For historical background, read: P. Sarris, *Empires of Faith: The Fall of Rome to the Rise of Islam, 500-700* (Oxford, 2011), 226-274.

- **BL Add. 14,461** (compare Palmer and Penn translations)
- **Thomas the Presbyter** (compare Palmer and Penn translations)
- Excerpts from *The Doctrine of Jacob the Recently Baptized* [Best editoini: Gilbert Dagron and Vincent Déroche, "Juifs et Chrétiens dans l'Orient du VIIe siècle," *Travaux et Mémoires* 11 (1991): 17-273]
 - S.W. Anthony, "Muḥammad, the Keys to Paradise, and the *Doctrina Iacobi*: A Late Antique Puzzle," *Der Islam* 91 (2014): 243-65.

SESSION 3 - Jan 30

Muḥammad and the Islamic Conquests before the Islamic Tradition

- **Ps.-Sebeos, *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos***, tr. R.W. Thomson (Liverpool, 1999), 1: 94-103.
 - Robert Hoyland, "Sebeos, the Jews and the Rise of Islam," in *Medieval and Modern Perspectives on Muslim-Jewish Relations*, ed. R. L. Nettle (Luxembourg, 1995), 89-102.
- Robert W. Thomson, "Muhammad and the Origin of Islam in Armenian Literary Tradition," in *Armenian Studies in Memoriam Haig Bebérian* (Lisbon 1986), 829-858 [[click here](#)]
- **Jacob of Edessa, *Letters and Chronicle***, tr. Penn
 - Robert Hoyland, "Jacob of Edessa on Islam," in *After Bardaisan: Studies on Continuity and Change in Syriac Christianity in Honour of Professor Han J. W. Drijvers*, ed. G. J. Reinink and A. C. Klugkist (Leuven, 1999), 149-60.

SESSION 4 - Feb 6

Western Syriac Historiography

- Michael Phillip Penn, “God’s War and His Warriors: The First Hundred Years of Syriac Accounts of the Islamic Conquests,” in *Just Wars, Holy Wars, & Jihad*, ed. Sohail H. Hashim (Oxford, 2012), 69-90.
- *Maronite Chronicle* (compare Penn and Palmer)
 - Andrew Marsham, “The Architecture of Allegiance in Early Islamic Late Antiquity: The Accession of Mu‘āwiya in Jerusalem, ca. 661 CE,” in *Court Ceremonies and Rituals of Power in Byzantium and the Medieval Mediterranean*, eds. A. Beihammer, S. Constantinou, and M. Parani (Leiden 2013), 87-112.
- Excerpts from *Theophilus of Edessa*, tr. R. Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa’s Chronicle and the Circulation of Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Liverpool, 2012).

SESSION 5 - Feb 13

Eastern Syriac Historiography

- *John bar Penkāyē, Rēš Mellē* (tr. Penn and Brock)
 - Gerrit J. Reinink, “East Syrian Historiography in Response to the Rise of Islam: The Case of John bar Penkaye’s *Ktābā d-rēš mellē*,” in *Redefining Christian Identity: Cultural Interaction in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam*, eds. J. J. van Ginkel, H. L. Murre-van den Berg, and T.M. Vant Lint (Leuven, 2005), 77-90.
- *Chronicle of Khuzistan*, tr. Penn
 - Chase Robinson, “The Conquest of Khuzistan: A Historiographical Reassessment,” *BSOAS* (2004) 67: 14-39.

SESSION 6 - Feb 20

Islam in early Christian Disputational Literature

- David G.K. Taylor, “*The Disputation between a Muslim and a Monk of Bēt Ḥālē*: Syriac Text and Annotated English Translation,” in *Christsein in der islamischen Welt: Festschrift für Martin Tamcke zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. S.H. Griffith and S. Grebenstein (Wiesbaden 2015), 187-242.
 - G. J. Reinink, “The Beginning of Syriac Apologetic Literature in Response to Islam,” *Oriens Christianus* 77 (1993): 165-187.
- *John Damascene, De Haeresibus*, tr. J. Sahas
 - S.W. Anthony, “Fixing John Damascene’s Biography: Historical Notes on His Family Background,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 23 (2015): 607-27.
- Excerpts from *The Leo III - ‘Umar II Correspondence*, tr. A. Jeffery [Best edition/translation: *La correspondance d’Omar et de Léon*, tr. Jean-Pierre Mahé and ed. Alexan Hakobian (Paris: ACHCByz, 2015)]
 - Cecilia Palombo, “The ‘correspondence’ of Leo III and ‘Umar II: Traces of an early Arabic apologetic Work,” *Millennium* 12 (2015), 231-64.

SESSION 7 - Feb 27

Apocalyptic Responses to the Islamic Conquests (1 of 2)

- Excerpts from *The Syriac-Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* (compare Brock [in Palmer] and Penn)
 - G.J. Reinink, "Pseudo-Methodius: A concept of history in response to the rise of Islam," in *The Byzantine and early Islamic Near East, I: Problems in the literary source material*, ed. L.I. Conrad and A. Cameron (Princeton, 1992), 149-87.
- *Sermon of Pseudo-Ephrem on the End of the World* (compare Penn and Reeves [[click here](#)])
 - G. J. Reinink, "Pseudo-Methodius and the Pseudo-Ephremian *Sermo de fine mundi*," in *Media Latinitas*, eds. R. I. A Nip, H. van Dijk, E. M. C. van Houts, C. H. Kneepkens, and G. A. A. Kortekaas (Turnhout, 1996), 317-21.
- Excerpts from *The Baḥīrā Apocalypse (East-Syriac Recension)*, trans. B. Rogemma
 - Krisztina Szilágyi, "Muḥammad and the Monk: The Making of the Christian Baḥīrā Legend," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 34 (2008): 169-214. [[click here](#)]

SESSION 8 - Mar 6

Apocalyptic Responses to the Islamic Conquests (2 of 2)

- John C. Reeves, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic* (Atlanta, 2005), 1-28, « Introduction ».
- *The Secrets of Rabbi Shim'ōn b. Yoḥai*, tr. Reeves
 - S. W. Anthony, "Who was the Shepherd of Damascus? The Enigma of Jewish and Messianist Responses to the Islamic Conquests in Marwānid Syria and Mesopotamia," in *The Lineaments of Islam: Studies in Honor of Fred McGraw Donner* (Leiden, 2012), 21-59.
- Excerpts from *Zand ī Wahman Yasn*, from Carlo Cereti, *The Zand ī Wahmān Yasn: A Zoroastrian Apocalypse* (Rome 1995).
- François de Blois, "A Persian Poem Lamenting the Arab Conquest," in *Studies in Honour of Clifford Edmund Bosworth, vol. 2: The Sultan's Turret: Studies in Persian and Turkish Culture*, ed. Carole Hillenbrand (Brill: Leiden, 2000), 82-95.

Mar 13, Mar 20 - SPRING BREAK & AOS - No Class

SESSION 9 - Mar 27

The Enigma of 'Abd al-Malik's Dome of the Rock

- Amikam Elad, "Why did 'Abd al-Malik build the Dome of the Rock? A re-examination of the Muslim Sources," in *Bayt al-Maqdis: 'Abd al-Malik's Jerusalem*, ed. J. Raby and J. Johns (Oxford, 1992), 241-308 and idem, "'Abd al-Malik and the Dome of the Rock: a further examination of the Muslim sources," *JSAI* 35 (2008): 167-226.
- Nasser Rabbat, "The Meaning of the Dome of the Rock," *Muqarnas* 6 (1989): 12-21 and idem, "The Dome of the Rock Revisited: Some Remarks on al-Wāsiṭī's Accounts," *Muqarnas* 10 (1993): 66-75.

SESSION 10 - Apr 3

How early is the Qur'ān?

- Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Darwin, 1998), 35-63, "The Date of the Qur'ānic Text".
- Behnam Sadeghi and Mohsen Goudarzi, "Şan'ā' 1 and the Origins of the Qur'ān," *Der Islam* 87 (2012): 1-129.
- Patricia Crone, "How did the quranic pagans make a living?" *BSOAS* 68 (2005): 387-399. [[click here](#)]

SESSION 11 - Apr 10

Documentary Sources and Their Value

- Robert Hoyland, "New Documentary texts and the early Islamic state," *BSOAS* (2006): 395-416 [[click here](#)]
- Stefan Heidemann, "The Evolving Representation of the Early Islamic Empire and Its Religion on Coin Imagery," in *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu* (Leiden, 2010), 149-195. [[click here](#)]
- Frédéric Imbert, "L'Islam des pierres: l'expression de la foi dans les graffiti arabes des premiers siècles," *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 129 (2011) [Online]. URL: <http://remmm.revues.org/7067>

SESSION 12 - Apr 17

The Birth of Arabic Historiography

- Stephen Shoemaker, "In Search of 'Urwa's *Sīra*: Methodological Issues in the Quest for the Historical Muḥammad," *Der Islam* 85 (2011): 257-341.
- Andreas Görke, Harald Motzki, and Gregor Schoeler, "First Century Sources for the Life of Muḥammad? A Debate," *Der Islam* 89 (2012): 2-59
- S.W. Anthony, "[The Letters Attributed to 'Urwah ibn al-Zubayr \(d. ca. 93-94/711-13\)](#): An early corpus of traditions on the life of the Prophet Muḥammad."

SESSION 14 - Apr 24

Documentary Sources in Literary Guises?

- Michael Lecker, *The "Constitution of Medina": Muḥammad's First Legal Document* (Princeton, 2004).
- Martin Hinds, "[The Şiffin Arbitration Agreement](#)," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 17 (1972): 93-129.
- Andrew Marsham, "[The Pact \(amāna\) between Mu'āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān and 'Amr ibn al-Āṣ](#) (656 or 658 CE): 'Documents' and the Islamic Historical Tradition," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 57 (2012): 69-96.