

*Mapping the Classical Islamic World*¹

CLASSICS (CLS 0192-01)

Spring 2013

¹ Spring 2014 @ Tufts University
Cross-listed with
International Relations and
Middle Eastern Studies Major

Where: MoWe 4:30–5:45

When: Aidekman Arts Center, Room 013

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Office: Perseus Project

Office hours: MoWe 6-7pm & by appointment

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Syllabus version: January 28, 2014

NB: The following is a working syllabus and content may be added and/or slightly modified as the class goes on.

Course Description & Syllabus

WHAT HAS BAGHDAD TO DO WITH DAMASCUS—OR WITH RABAT? We see the Islamic world as a series of nations on the map of the twenty-first century, but the real map has little to do with the boundaries of current nation states and much to do with the links that structure the Islamic world that began to be forged fourteen hundred years ago. Through the study of the detailed descriptions contained in the work *The Best Division for Knowledge of the Regions* by al-Muqaddasī (10th century), the last representative of the classical school of Arab geography, students will examine the geographical, economic, political, religious and cultural factors that kept this world together and pulled it apart. By encountering the structure of the Islamic world of the past, students will gain an invaluable insight how it is organized in the present and its possibilities for the future.

Digital tools will facilitate these explorations. Students will work with Geographic Information Systems (GIS), one of the most exciting (and marketable) new technologies to map the Islamic world. Digital multilingual tools will facilitate students' encounter with the original texts, whether or not students have had prior exposure to Modern Standard Arabic. Students of Arabic will have an opportunity to work with Classical Arabic sources using state-of-the-art multilingual services to leverage their current knowledge. Students with no knowledge of Arabic will use existing English translations that can be used in combination with the original text. All students will have an opportunity to contribute to a major new project that will reinvent how we visualize and understand the Islamic World. By the end of the course we will produce an interactive map of the classical Islamic world, with its major provinces, towns, villages and routes

that connected them. Valuable in and of itself, it will become a crucial tool for the study of other primary sources on Islamic history.

CONCENTRATING ON DIGITAL HUMANITIES, this course aims at achieving two major goals. One, more traditional, is to introduce students to the medieval Arabic geography in general, and a specific geographical treatise in particular. We are to learn what the Islamic world was in geographical terms, what were its major provinces and how these provinces were interconnected. The second goal, less traditional, is to introduce students to some digital approaches and tools that facilitate working with historical and geographical information. One of the most important things to learn is how to work with data.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Required Readings & Materials

Main Source • al-Muqaddasī, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad. *The Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions = Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm Fī Maʿrifat al-Aqālīm*. Translated by Basil Anthony Collins. The Great Books of Islamic Civilization. Reading: Garnet, 2001. Available @ [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

Main references • ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF ISLAM, 2ND AND 3RD EDITIONS. [Brill Online, 2013](https://www.b Brill Online, 2013). [Tufts University Library](https://www.tufts.edu/lib); • HISTORICAL ATLAS OF ISLAM. Edited by: Hugh Kennedy. [Brill Online, 2013](https://www.b Brill Online, 2013). [Tufts University Library](https://www.tufts.edu/lib)

Other readings will be available via Trunk or Tufts Digital Library

Software • [Zotero](https://www.zotero.org), • [Google Earth](https://www.google.com/earth/), • [Google Docs](https://docs.google.com/), • [ArcGIS](https://www.arcgis.com/) (or • [qGIS](https://www.qgis.org/)), • [Python](https://www.python.org/) (3.2.2 and higher), • text editor (such as [EditPad Lite](https://www.editpad.com/) for Windows)

Assignments & Grading

Attendance and in-class discussion/participation	20%
Midterm	20%
Digital Project: Annotation	10%
Digital Project: Articles Review	10%
Digital Project: Arabic language project	10%
Digital Project: Georeferencing & Visualization	10%
Final Digital Project: Thematic Map	20%

Digital projects

NB: Detailed descriptions of and instructions for each project will be provided in the Appendix to the Syllabus.

PROJECT I is a review that must summarize major contributions of 10 article (half a page per article). Tufts library catalog offers a rather significant number of titles that can be reviewed; a great number of articles can also be found in such repositories as JSTOR, Project MUSE, and ProQuest. Summarizing the articles, try answering succinctly the following questions: 1) What GIS technologies have been used? 2) What historical questions they allow to answer? 3) Has this been done convincingly? 4) How else can these approaches be used with regard to the topic of the course?

REVIEWS OF STUDIES THAT RELY ON
HISTORICAL GIS

PROJECT II will involve short annotations for major entities that feature our source. The goal is to identify them succinctly, but using reliable sources (for example, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*), citing them appropriately. Later on, these annotations are to be used for final projects, thematic maps. Every student must submit these identification online into a shared document at least 2 hours before the beginning of the class. "Entities" may include anything mentioned in the text: terms, individuals, places etc. (5 entities for each class). Detailed annotation scheme and instructions will be provided.

ANNOTATING DATA FROM THE SOURCE

PROJECT III is a language exercise. Depending on whether you studied Arabic before or not, you will get one of the following two assignments that involve working with the original Arabic text. *If you have never studied Arabic before*, you will be given short sections of Arabic text (5-10 short definitions of place names from our main source, all sharing the same structure). Your goal will be to figure (a) how the name of the place is pronounced, and (b) what kind of place that is. You will be encouraged to use any means to solve this (electronic dictionaries, translators, friends who know Arabic, etc.). Detailed instructions will be provided. *If you studied Arabic before*, your task will be to provide Arabic equivalents and their proper transliteration to the annotated data that everybody will be working on. We can discuss more challenging options.

ARABIC LANGUAGE PROJECT

PROJECT IV is a complex task that involves working with multiple sources that come in different formats and different digital tools that help us create necessary data sets and visualize them. The main goal of this section is to get acquainted with the basic concepts of data formats (tabulated format/CSV, XML/KML), data manipulation

GEOREFERENCING & VISUALIZATION:
BUILDING DIGITAL MAPS

(conversion from one format to another with Python scripts), and data visualization (using Google Earth).

PROJECT V is aimed at combining information produced within previous projects in order to create thematic maps for the Islamic world of our period. Thematic maps may include one of the following: (a) religious groups; legal schools; Qurʾānic recitations; (b) local dynasties; (c) economies: production, exports, measures, weights, coinage, taxes; (d) languages; (e) sacred geography: mosques and holy places; (f) sights and marvels; (e) customs and curiosities.

FINAL PROJECT: THEMATIC MAPS

Course Workflow Overview

The course is made of three major parts. During the first part of the course we will discuss the essentials, namely the importance of geography for understanding history, and hence the present. We will also discuss major topics of al-Muqaddasī's geographical treatise and what we can learn from this source using geographical information systems. DIGITAL PROJECT I (*GIS Articles Review*) will be due by the end of the first part.

PART I

During the second part of the course we will be reading al-Muqaddasī's descriptions of each major province and extracting all the information that can be visualized on geographical maps; first and foremost, this means identifying major geographical entities (districts, metropolises, towns, large villages, and key way stations); finding their locations using available means; and adding this information into our database; with major entities identified, we will connect them via the network of main roads and trade routes that al-Muqaddasī also provides. DIGITAL PROJECTS II, III and IV will be due by the end of the second part (*Annotation, Arabic Language Project, Georeferencing & Visualization*, respectively).

PART II

During the third part of the course we will concentrate on completing your final projects. We will re-read al-Muqaddasī's treatise from specific thematic perspectives that your selected for your final projects and discuss them in class. THE FINAL DIGITAL PROJECT (*Thematic Maps*) will be due by the end of this part and the last session of our class will be reserved for your presentations of your final research (**NB:** Your annotated maps will be available on the website of our project afterwards).

PART III

Policies

THE BEST WAY TO CONTACT ME is via [e-mail](#). I check my email regularly and I will try to respond to your questions within 24 hours. The turnover time, however, will be longer on weekends. E-mail, however, is not instantaneous and you might be able to find the answer to your question on the syllabus or by talking with your classmates. They are a great resource! Please, include "Mapping the Classical Islamic World," or "MCIW" in the subject line of your e-mail; this will also help me to recognize it and ensure that it does not end up in the junk mail folder.

CONTACTING INSTRUCTOR

CLASS ATTENDANCE IS REQUIRED. Absences for religious holidays, family emergencies, and properly documented medical reasons will be excused. Missed quizzes and exams can be completed upon presentation of proper documentation.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

ALL ASSIGNMENTS MUST BE SUBMITTED ON TIME, unless previously discussed. The grade for a late assignment will be decreased 1/5 of the total grade per day. All assignments must be submitted before the end of the semester.

ASSIGNMENTS

STUDENTS CAN MAKE UP WORK missed for religious holidays if they notify the instructor in advance. Let me know as early as possible in the semester so that we can make arrangements.

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

ALL NECESSARY ACCOMMODATIONS will be made for students with documented disabilities.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

STUDENTS ARE REQUIRED to turn their cell phones and other electronic devices off when in class.

CELL PHONE POLICY

STUDENTS SHOULD BE AWARE of the University's policies on academic integrity. Plagiarism, submission of work that is not one's own or for which previous credit has been obtained, any other form of cheating during tests and/or examinations, and personation at tests and/or examinations are all examples of academic dishonesty. Any instances of academic dishonesty will be handled in accordance with university policy.

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC ETHICS:
If necessary, consult Tufts University's resources on [plagiarism](#) and [academic integrity](#).

SYLLABUS

*Part I: Essentials***1/15/2014** (Wednesday)

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Materials to study at home: • Scheidel, W. and Meeks, E. (May 2, 2012). *ORBIS: The Stanford Geospatial Network Model of the Roman World* @ orbis.stanford.edu; • PLEIADES: a community-built gazetteer and graph of ancient places @ pleiades.stoa.org.

1/20/2014 (Monday)**Martin Luther King Day: No Class****1/22/2014** (Wednesday)

THE TRADITION OF ARABIC GEOGRAPHY.

Materials: • “Djughrāfiyā,” in *El2*; • Miquel, A. “al-Muqaddasī,” in *El2*; • al-Muqaddasī’s “The Best Divisions.” (read Translator’s Introduction (pp. xxi-xxx) and al-Muqaddasī’s Introduction (pp. 1-8)

Things to focus on: • familiarize yourself with the structure of the entire book; • identify major topics of chapters and their structure; • start thinking about what theme you may want to choose for your final project.

1/27/2014 (Monday)

MAPPING THEN, MAPPING NOW.

Materials: • al-Muqaddasī’s “The Best Divisions:” Arabic maps of regions are in the sections of the book on those regions (listed on p. vii); • English keys to Arabic maps are in the Appendix, pp. 405-424); • images of other Arabic maps & modern maps on Trunk; • A great resource for maps, both medieval Arabic and modern is: *An Historical Atlas of Islam*. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2002. [Available online via Tufts University Library](#); • Familiarize yourself with the maps from Cornu’s *Atlas Du Monde Arabo-Islamique* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1983) on Trunk.

Things to think about: • What are the distinctive features of medieval Arabic maps? • Choose one of al-Muqaddasī’s maps and compare it with modern geographical maps. • To what extent do they correspond to modern maps?

1/29/2014 (Wednesday)

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY OF THE ISLAMIC[ATE] WORLD up until the 10th century CE. **Materials:** • al-Muqaddasī, pp. 34-40; • Graphs of sectarian divisions [Trunk]; • moderns maps of sectarian divisions

[Trunk]; • brief descriptions of major sectarian groups [Trunk]; **Additional readings:** • relevant articles in the *EL2*; • al-Shahrastānī's *Kitāb al-mīlāl wa'l-niḥāl* (Translation: al-Shahrastānī, Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Karīm. *Muslim Sects and Divisions: The Section on Muslim Sects*. London; Boston: Kegan Paul International, 1984; Arabic text is available online);

Things to think about: • How does al-Muqaddasī classify different religious groups? • What are the major issues around which Muslim split into factions? • How does that correspond to modern classifications?

Working comment: • study information on religious groups (associate locations with specific groups > map data); • preliminary maps can be done on paper, or, better, in Google Earth (however provisionally).

2/03/2014 (Monday)

ISLAMIC DYNASTIES UP UNTIL THE 10TH CENTURY CE.

Materials: • Graphs of major Islamic dynasties [Trunk]; • Bosworth, Clifford Edmund. *The Islamic Dynasties: a Chronological and Genealogical Handbook*. Edinburgh, 1967 [Trunk; book reserve]

Things to think about: • study information on rulers/dynasties and start building preliminary maps (associate locations with dynastic groups > map data); • preliminary maps can be done on paper, or, better, in Google Earth (however provisionally).

2/05/2014 (Wednesday)

MAJOR LANDSCAPE FEATURES: Seas, Rivers, Mountains, Deserts.

Materials: al-Muqaddasī: • *Accounts on Seas and Rivers* (pp. 9-22); • *the Desert of the Beduins* (pp. 207-214); • *the Iranian desert* (pp. 394-404). **Things to think about:** • Identify major geographical objects from these sections with modern geographical entities. • Make sure you can find/show them on modern maps. • Think about how these geographical factors could have affected connections between different regions of the Islamic world.

— **Digital Projects:** • Project I (Article Reviews) is due; • confirm your topic for Project II (Annotations).

Part II: Mapping Regions and Provinces

2/10/2014 (Monday)

JAZĪRAT AL-ʿARAB: The Arabian Peninsula

Materials: al-Muqaddasī's "The Best Divisions" (relevant section).

2/12/2014 (Wednesday)

AL-ʿIRĀQ: Lower Mesopotamia

Materials: al-Muqaddasī's "The Best Divisions" (relevant section).

2/17/2014 (Monday)

Presidents' Day Observed: No Class

2/19/2014 (Wednesday)

AQŪR/AL-JAZĪRA: Upper Mesopotamia

Materials: al-Muqaddasī's "The Best Divisions" (relevant section).

2/24/2014 (Monday)

AL-SHĀM: Greater Syria

Materials: al-Muqaddasī's "The Best Divisions" (relevant section).

2/26/2014 (Wednesday)

MİŞR: Egypt

Materials: al-Muqaddasī's "The Best Divisions" (relevant section).

3/03/2014 (Monday)

AL-MAGHRIB: Northwestern Africa & Andalusia (Spain)

Materials: al-Muqaddasī's "The Best Divisions" (relevant section).

3/05/2014 (Wednesday)

AL-MASHRIQ/KHURĀSĀN: Northeastern Iran

Materials: al-Muqaddasī's "The Best Divisions" (relevant section).

3/10/2014 (Monday)

AL-MASHRIQ/MĀ WARĀ'-L-NAHR: Central Asia

Materials: al-Muqaddasī's "The Best Divisions" (relevant section).

3/12/2014 (Wednesday)

MIDTERM

3/17/2014 (Monday)

Spring Recess: No Class

3/19/2014 (Wednesday)

Spring Recess: No Class

3/24/2014 (Monday)

AL-DAYLAM AND GĪLĀN: Northwestern Iran

Materials: al-Muqaddasī's "The Best Divisions" (relevant section).

3/26/2014 (Wednesday)

AL-RİḤĀB: Azerbaijan & Armenia

Materials: al-Muqaddasī's "The Best Divisions" (relevant section).

3/31/2014 (Monday)

AL-JIBĀL: Mountain region in WNW Iran & ENE Iraq

Materials: al-Muqaddasī's "The Best Divisions" (relevant section).

4/02/2014 (Wednesday)

KHŪZISTĀN: Southeastern Iraq & Southwestern Iran

Materials: al-Muqaddasī's "The Best Divisions" (relevant section).

4/07/2014 (Monday)

FĀRS: Southwestern Iran

Materials: al-Muqaddasī's "The Best Divisions" (relevant section).

4/09/2014 (Wednesday)

KĪRMĀN: South Central Iran

Materials: al-Muqaddasī's "The Best Divisions" (relevant section).

4/14/2014 (Monday)

AL-SIND: Plain of Lower Indus/Pakistan

Materials: al-Muqaddasī's "The Best Divisions" (relevant section).

— **Digital Projects:** • Projects II (Annotations), III (Arabic Language Project), and III (Georeferencing &) are due.

Part III: Putting everything together

4/16/2014 (Wednesday) RELIGIOUS GROUPS OF THE ISLAMIC WORLD
(Provisional, Subject to Change)

Things to think about: Re-read sections on religious groups from the descriptions of each region (exact pages are to be provided by those who work on this subject); concentrate on things that are common and different between the regions. We will discuss these differences and commonalities.

4/21/2014 (Monday)

LOCAL DYNASTIES (Provisional, Subject to Change)

Things to think about: Re-read sections on rulers from the descriptions of each region (exact pages are to be provided by those who work on this subject); concentrate on things that are common and different between the regions. We will discuss these differences and commonalities.

4/23/2014 (Wednesday)

TRADE AND ECONOMY (Provisional, Subject to Change)

Things to think about: Re-read sections on economic and trade peculiarities from the descriptions of each region (exact pages are to be provided by those who work on this subject); concentrate on things that are common and different between the regions. We will discuss these differences and commonalities.

4/28/2014 (Monday)

Final projects presentations

Appendix II: Practicum Assignments

ZOTERO

1. Download and install ZOTERO: STANDALONE from www.zotero.org.
2. Install a connector for your browser (from the download page)
3. Add a book reference from Amazon and/or the Tufts Library Catalog
 - find al-Muqaddasī's translation, open the page, and click on a blue book icon.²
 - download a PDF from Trunk and attach it to the record.³
4. Add a book reference using ISBN number.⁴ Use the following ISBNs:
 - 9781405191463, 9780226808772, 9781848854512, 0871698560, 9780199913879
5. Add an article reference using DOI number:
 - 10.3200/HMTS.41.1.39-64
6. Add an article from JSTOR:
 - find any article on GIS
 - see what happens...

² It is in the right corner of the address pane of your browser.

³ Drag-n-drop the PDF file on the record in Zotero.

⁴ 5th button on a panel with icons: "Add Item(s) by Identifier."