Islam, it has been said, is primarily an urban civilization. Simultaneously a religion and a way of life, Islam was originally founded in a city, and the rich history of its social and intellectual institutions is virtually unthinkable outside the context of the urban environment. Indeed, perhaps no religion has ever been more closely associated with the city (Arabic, al-madina), both literally, and as a mental and spiritual landscape. Or so we are told. What is the Islamic city? Is such a term useful when considering a religion that spanned three continents, countless urban centers, and had gathered under its aegis people of multiple faiths, ethnicities, and races to form the rich multicultural stew of premodern Islamic civilization? Furthermore, despite the urban nature of Islamic society, few of the earliest Islamic cities were founded ex nihilo. To what degree did pre-existing Greek, Roman, and Sasanian city fabrics affect the Islamic cities that grew up in their midst? Did medieval Islam’s complex and sophisticated social and legal institutions influence the development of an ‘archetypal’ Islamic city? If so, how did medieval interlocutors view the ‘ideal’ Islamic city? And in what way was that ideal similar to/different from contemporary European iterations of the medieval city?

In this seminar we will explore the morphology and sociology of cities in Islamic history, using primary texts and architectural/archaeological data to identify and analyze the factors shaping civic forms and structures. We will examine a variety of individual cities, from fiat cities planned by Caliphal decree to those that developed on top of some of the world’s oldest continuously inhabited urban centers. We will probe how medieval Muslims themselves conceptualized, understood, and represented their cities, both textually and visually. At the same time, we will critically examine the idea of the “Islamic City” as it evolved in the West, from the earliest observations of nineteenth-century Orientalist scholars and Muslim reformers to contemporary academic formulations. From the Medina of the Prophet to the early modern madina, we will ask if the framework of the Islamic City might still be relevant, over 1400 years after the advent of this world-encompassing faith.

**Class Requirements:**
- Attendance and participation
- Periodic presentations of readings
- Presentation of research project to class at end of semester
- Research paper on topic of your choosing (15-20 pgs.)

**Required Texts:** A coursepack is available at Jenn’s Copies, 2200 Guadalupe

**Accommodations:** If you need accommodations for exceptional needs please notify me at the beginning of the semester by obtaining a letter from the Services for Students with Disabilities Office. You may contact the SSD Office at 471-6259 or 471-4641 TTY.
Part I. Typologies of Early Islamic City Structure: Urban History and Urban Form

Week 1

August 24: NO CLASS

Week 2
Introduction

August 31:


Week 3
Is there an Islamic City?

September 7:

• Stefan Peychev, “Max Weber and the Islamic City,” 22 pp. [http://www.academia.edu/329856/Max_Weber_and_the_Islamic_City](http://www.academia.edu/329856/Max_Weber_and_the_Islamic_City)

Week 4
Inherited Cities:
The Classical Legacy in the Eastern Mediterranean

September 14:


Further Reading
• Idem. Mémorial Jean Sauvaget. Damascus, 1954. Especially the articles on Laodicée-sur-Mer, the Citadel of Aleppo, and Sergiopolis, which cover the full range of Sauvaget's interest in pre-Islamic urbanism in the Levant.

Week 5
Founded Cities
Forbidden City - Fiat City: Baghdad and Samarra

September 21:
Baghdad:

Samarra:
• al-Ya’qūbī, Kitāb al-Buldān (selections.) Translated in K.A.C. Creswell, Early Muslim Architecture vol. II (Oxford, 1940), Chapters “Samarra I” and “III.” Located in the Fine Arts Library reserve. I would like you to see and handle this book and look at the images. Read the translations of al- Ya’qūbī inset into the text in volume II, pp. 228-231 and pp. 277-78. Call number: -F- NA 381 C7 1969

Further Reading


• Etienne de la Vaissière, *Samarcande et Samarra. Élites d'Asie centrale dans l'empire abbasid* (Peeters, 2007)

**Part II. The Islamic City as Medieval Metropolis**

**Week 6**

*Urban Structure / Communal Structure:*

*The Social World of the Medieval City*

**September 28:**


**Further Reading:**


**Week 7**

*Cities and Citadels*

*The Transformation of Urban Structure in the Medieval Period*

**October 5:**


• Goitein, S.D. “Urban Housing in Fatimid and Ayyubid times as illustrated by the Cairo Geniza documents” Studia Islamica 47 (1978): 5-23.

Further Reading:
• Tabbaa, Yasser. Constructions of Power and Piety in Medieval Aleppo (University Park, PA, 1997).

Part III: Two Early Modern Case Studies

Week 8
Istanbul
Late Antique Polis to Early Modern Capital

October 12:
• Inalcik, Halil, “Istanbul: an Islamic City,” Journal of Islamic Studies 1 (1990), 1-23.

Further Reading:

Week 9
Half The World
The Isfahan of Shah ʿAbbās

October 19:


Further Reading:


Part IV. People, Functions and Institutions of the Islamic City

Week 10
*Bazar, Suq, Hospital*
Economic, Legal, and Charitable Institutions of Islamic Cities

October 26:

**PAPER PROPOSALS WITH TENTATIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE**

and notes by R. P. Buckley (Oxford/NY, 1999) (selections, ca. 50 pp. of pretty entertaining stuff).

Further Reading:

Week 11
Faith and Piety in Islamic Urbanism:
Sacralization of Space, Pilgrimage, Shrines and Cemeteries, 
*Fad’ail* literature

November 2:
• Talmon-Heller, Daniella. *Islamic Piety in Medieval Syria: Mosques, Cemeteries and Sermons under the Zangids and Ayyūbids* (1140-1260) (Leiden, 2007), pp. 179-209.

Further Reading:
• Meri, Josef W. *The Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria* (Oxford, 2002).

**Part V. Whither the ‘Islamic City’?**

**Week 12**

Rethinking the Old Models

**November 9:**

**Further Reading**

**Week 13**

Contemporary Cities: Romanticized Past, Urban Spectacle, Stage for Revolutionary Performance

**November 16:**
• AlSayyad, N. *et al., Making Cairo Medieval* (Lanham, MD, 2005), pp. 9-27.


Week 14

November 23:
NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

Week 15

November 30:
Student Presentations

Extra Meeting for Presentations?

December 7:
Student Presentations