

Instructor: Elias G. Saba
Email: sabaelia@grinnell.edu
Office: HSSC N2152
Office Hours: M, Th 1:00pm–2:30pm
or by appointment

His 100-01: Introduction to Historical Inquiry – The Prophet Muhammad
Fall 2023

Course Description:

This course provides an introduction to issues of historical causation, argumentation, and evidence, by exploring the life and impact of the prophet Muhammad on the Arabian Peninsula and West Asia in the early seventh century. We will begin with an introduction to the study of history and historical methods. From there, we will read a variety of primary and secondary sources in order to answer the question: Who was the Prophet Muhammad?

Course Requirements:

This is a seminar course. It is imperative that each student carefully read all of the assigned readings on time and comes to class ready to participate in class discussion.

In this course, we will focus on reading primary texts and thinking about how to interpret them. Learning how to read and interpret primary texts is a deceptively complex task, so we will carry out this charge in a variety of ways, through formal and informal writing and through class discussion. It is vital that you prepare all of the readings and be open to the difficulty of this seemingly simple task.

In addition, there will be a series of formal assignments designed to push you to evaluate and re-evaluate primary texts. The final assignment will be an annotated bibliography for a research project on Muhammad. Each of the writing assignments is designed to promote a different way of reading history and to help push you to locate historical information from primary sources. They can also all be seen as different ways of preparing you for the final annotated bibliography, which requires you to envisage a project that employs the skills we will develop in this course.

All assignments must be submitted to pass the course. There is no penalty for early assignments. Late assignments will be penalized a third of a letter grade for every day late. Again, there is no penalty for early assignments. Repeat, there is no penalty for early assignments.

Grading:

- Assignment One (10%) [Sep. 1]
- Assignment Two (10%) [Sep. 18]

- Assignment Three (10%) [Oct. 30]
- Primary Source Presentation (5%) [Oct. 9, 11, 13]
- Annotated Bibliography (35%) [Dec. 8]
- Final Presentations (5%) [Dec. 6, 8, 10]
- Participation (25%)

Learning Outcomes:

- Learn how to identify primary and secondary sources.
- Learn how to read and critically analyze primary and secondary sources.
- Engage with history as a craft and a discipline.
- Understand a variety of different concepts and methods for investigating and explaining the past.
- Develop your skills of oral communication, dialogue, and classroom citizenship.
- Gain a thorough understanding of the life of the Prophet Muhammad and the challenges of describing this life.

Course Policies:

- I try always to prioritize belonging and generosity in our learning spaces. For both teachers and learners, this means respecting and remaining curious about others' individual experiences, traditions, and ideas; working toward critical distance from aspects of our own experiences; and maintaining openness to being unsettled by perspectives and experiences different from our own. I ask that all members of our course community consider equity of access in the ways we speak and engage others, share materials for exploration and discussion, and use examples when contributing to class conversation.
- You are expected to attend every class. Two or more unexcused absences will have a negative impact on your final grade. Grinnell College offers alternative options to complete academic work for students who observe religious holy days. Please contact me within the first three weeks of the semester if you would like to discuss a specific instance that applies to you. If you miss a class, make sure you do the assigned readings and get notes from a classmate. Class preparedness and participation is a major factor in the final grade and unexcused absences will count against this final grade. Missing more than 30% of the classes with unexcused absences will result in a failing grade.
- Please send all e-mail to sabaelia@grinnell.edu. In an attempt at work-life balance, I do not have access to my e-mail on my phone nor do I check e-mail after 8:00pm. During the work week, I will respond to within 24 hours. It may take longer to respond during the weekend. Feel free to send any questions you may have about the course, although I rather discuss substantive issues in person rather than via e-mail.
- Breaches of academic integrity will result in an official disciplinary process guided by the Dean's office. If you have questions about the Academic Honesty policy, the College's

Academic Honesty policy is located in the Student Handbook available online [[link](#)]. The College expects that students are aware of and meet the expectations of this policy. Assignments in this course are not collaborative. You **may not** use “AI” chatbots or other Large Language Models for any assignment in this class. If you have any questions, please see me before you turn in your work.

- The College supports students’ efforts to meet both class obligations and religious ones. If you plan to observe religious holidays that coincide with class meetings or assignment due dates, please meet with me during the first two weeks of classes so that we may reach a mutual understanding of how you can meet these obligations.
- I strive to create a fully inclusive classroom, thus I welcome individual students to approach me about distinctive learning needs. In particular, I encourage students with disabilities to have a conversation with me and disclose how our classroom or course activities could impact the disability and what accommodations would be essential to you. You will also need to have a conversation about and provide documentation of your disability to the [Coordinator for Disability Resources](#), located on the ground level of Steiner Hall (641-269-3124).
- If you have other needs not addressed above, please let me know soon so that we can work together for the best possible learning environment. In some cases, I will recommend consulting with the Academic Advising staff. They are an excellent resource for developing strategies for academic success and can connect you with other campus resources as well: <http://www.grinnell.edu/about/offices-services/academic-advising>. If I notice that you are encountering difficulty, in addition to communicating with you directly about it, I will also likely submit an academic alert via Academic Advising’s SAL portal. This reminds you of my concern, and it notifies the Academic Advising team and your adviser(s) so that they can reach out to you with additional offers of support.

Textbooks

- John Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- Sarah Maza, *Thinking about History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).
- Ma‘mar ibn Rashid, *The Expeditions*, trans. Sean Anthony (New York: New York University Press, 2015). — **OPTIONAL**

Class Schedule:

Note: Readings are written on the day they are due. For instance, John Arnold’s *History: A Very Short Introduction*, 1–14 is to be read for class discuss on August 28th.

Class 1: Aug. 25

- Greetings, Introductions, Logistics.

Class 2: Aug. 28

- John Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction*, 1–14.
- Sarah Maza, *Thinking about History*, 1–9.
- Lauren Michele Jackson, “The 1619 Project and the Demands of Public History: *The New Yorker*, Dec. 8, 2021. [\[link\]](#)

Class 3: Aug. 30

- John Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction*, 15–34.
- Sarah Maza, *Thinking about History*, 10–44.

Class 4: Sept. 1

- Peters, F. E. “The Quest of the Historical Muhammad.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23 (1991): 291–315. [\[link\]](#)

Class 5: Sept. 4

- Kecia Ali “Historical Muhammad” in *Lives of Muhammad* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 6–40. [\[link\]](#)

****Assignment One Due [New Deadline]**

Class 6: Sept. 6

- Sean Anthony, “Introduction: The Making of the Historical Muḥammad,” in *Muḥammad and the Empires of Faith: The Making of the Prophet of Islam* (Oakland: University of California Press, 202, 1–22. [\[link\]](#)
- Robert Hoyland, “Writing the Biography of the Prophet Muhammad: Problems and Solutions” *History Compass* 5.2 (2007): 581–602. [\[link\]](#)

Class 7: Sept. 8

- John Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction*, 35–79.

Class 8: Sept. 11

- John Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction*, 80–123.

Class 9: Sept. 13

- Fred Donner, “Muhammad and the Believers’ Movement,” in *Muḥammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 39–90. [\[link\]](#)

Class 10: Sept. 15

- Asma Sayeed, “A Tradition Invented: The Female Companions” in *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 19–62. [\[link\]](#)

Class 11: Sept. 18

- Michael Muhammad Knight, “Muhammad’s Heart: The Modified Body” in *Muhammad’s Body* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 51-70. [\[link\]](#)

****Assignment Two Due**

Class 12: Sept. 20

· Ma‘mar ibn Rāshid, *The Expeditions: An Early Biography of Muḥammad*, trans. Sean Anthony (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 3–59. [[link](#)]

Class 13: Sept. 22

· Ma‘mar ibn Rāshid, *The Expeditions: An Early Biography of Muḥammad*, trans. Sean Anthony (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 60–108. [[link](#)]

Class 14: Sept. 25

· Ma‘mar ibn Rāshid, *The Expeditions: An Early Biography of Muḥammad*, trans. Sean Anthony (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 109–66. [[link](#)]

Class 15: Sept. 27

· Library Session 1 @ HSSC N2116.

Class 16: Sept. 29

· Sarah Maza, *Thinking about History*, 45–82.

Class 17: Oct. 2

· Sarah Maza, *Thinking about History*, 83–117.

Class 18: Oct. 4

· “The Life of Muḥammad” in Norman Calder, Jawid Mojaddedi, and Andrew Rippin, *Classical Islam: A Sourebook of Religious Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 23–55. [[link](#)]

Class 19: Oct. 6

· *A Midwife’s Tale* [[link](#)]

Class 20: Oct. 9

· Presentations on Primary Sources

Class 21: Oct. 11

· Presentations on Primary Sources

Class 22: Oct. 13

· Presentations on Primary Sources

Fall Break

Class 23: Oct. 23

· Library Session 2 @ Burling

Class 24: Oct. 25

· “Hadith” in Norman Calder, Jawid Mojaddedi, and Andrew Rippin, *Classical Islam: A Sourebook of Religious Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 55–86. [[link](#)]

Class 25: Oct. 27

· “The Qur’ān.” in Norman Calder, Jawid Mojaddedi, and Andrew Rippin, *Classical Islam: A Sourcebook of Religious Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 3–23. [[link](#)]

Class 26: Oct. 30

· Visit to Prints and Drawings Study Room to see Qurans. (@ Burling Basement)

Assignment Three Due

Class 27: Nov. 1

· Sarah Maza, *Thinking about History*, 118–156.

Class 28: Nov. 3

· No Class 😞

Class 29: Nov. 6

· “Letters: Isho’ayb III,” “Apocalypse of Pseudo-Ephrem,” “Khuzistan Chronicle,” “Account ad 637,” “Chronicle ad 640,” and “Letter: Athanasius of Balad” in Michael Philip Penn, ed. and trans., *When Christians First Met Muslims: A Sourcebook of the Earliest Syriac Writings on Islam* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015) [[link](#)]

Class 30: Nov. 8

· Sarah Maza, *Thinking about History*, 157–198.

Class 31: Nov. 10

· Sarah Maza, *Thinking about History*, 199–234.

Class 32: Nov. 13

· ‘Antarah ibn Shaddād, *War Songs*, trans. James Montgomery with Richard Sieburth (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 3–74. [[link](#)]

Class 33: Nov. 15

· Stephen J. Shoemaker, *A Prophet Has Appeared: The Rise of Islam through Christian and Jewish Eyes: A Sourcebook* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021): 47–51, 63–66, 85–87, 105–112, 139–40. (p-web)

Class 34: Nov. 17

· Hayden White, “Historical Text as Literary Artifact” *Clio* (1974) 3.3: 277–303. [[link](#)]

Class 35: Nov. 20

· Ma‘mar ibn Rāshid, *The Expeditions: An Early Biography of Muḥammad*, trans. Sean Anthony (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 3–59. [[link](#)]

Class 36: Nov. 22 [This is the Wednesday before Thanksgiving]

· No Class, Work on Final Projects

Class 37: Nov. 27

· Maʿmar ibn Rāshid, *The Expeditions: An Early Biography of Muḥammad*, trans. Sean Anthony (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 60–108. [[link](#)]

Class 38: Nov. 29

· Maʿmar ibn Rāshid, *The Expeditions: An Early Biography of Muḥammad*, trans. Sean Anthony (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 109–66. [[link](#)]

Class 39: Dec. 1

· *Patricia Crone, “The Rise of Islam” in *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*, 231–252. [[link](#)]

· *Markus Gross, “Early Islam: An Alternative Scenario of its Emergence” in *Routledge Handbook of Early Islam* (London: Routledge, 2017). [[link](#)]

Class 40: Dec. 4

· No Class

Class 41: Dec. 6

· Final Presentations

Class 42: Dec. 8

· Final Presentations

· **Annotated Bibliographies Due**

****Class 43: Dec. 12, 2:00pm–5:00pm**

· Final Presentations