

## *History 213 The Rise and Fall of the Abbasids*

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Department of History and Archaeology  
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### **Learning outcomes**

This course is a survey of the Abbasid caliphate from its establishment in 750 to the Seljuk take-over of Baghdad in 1055.

Upon completion of this course you can expect to have acquired knowledge of:

The origins, interpretation and results of the Abbasid revolution, the militarization of the state, the emergence of specific institutions, the process of political decentralization, and the flourishing of cultural and scientific achievements.

In addition you will be expected to improve your skills in:

- \*Gaining a sense of historical change and methodologies.
- \*Analyzing primary texts and documents.
- \*Improve through class discussions constructive oral skills.
- \*Improve your writing skills.
- \*Improve your critical reasoning skills.

### **Resources Available to Students**

Reading packet to be purchased from the AUB bookstore.

Web resources: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsalls/book1k.html>

### **Grading**

Class participation contributes to 15 % of your final grade

The students are required to write a mid-term exam 35%

And a final exam: 50%

Grading for History majors who are required to write a 5-7 book-review, due at the beginning of the reading period.

A mid-term exam: 25%

A final exam: 35%

Book-Review: 25%

Class participation: 15%

### **Course Policy**

This course has a lecture-discussion format. Regular and informed participation in class is essential. All students must come to class having read and reflected on the readings and are expected to participate actively in class discussion.

This course, in line with the university policy regarding academic honesty, considers any form of cheating a serious offense.

## **Schedule**

February 12  
Introduction

### **Week I: The Abbasid Revolution**

February 17 *Historical and Geographical Context*

February 19 *Origins of the Abbasid revolution: discussion of Frye's article.*

#### **Readings**

Richard Frye, "The Abbasid Conspiracy and Modern Revolutionary Theory," *Indo Iranica* 5(1952-3), 9-14.

Hugh Kennedy, "The Origins of the Abbasid Revolution," *The Early Abbasid Caliphate* (London, 1981), 35-45.

### **Week II The Abbasid Revolution and the Founding of a New Capital**

February 24 *The Success of the Abbasid Revolution*

February 26 *The Founding of Baghdad: Discussion of the Topography of the City*

#### **Readings**

Moshe Sharon, *Black Banners from the East*, 13-27.

Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates* (Harlow, 2004), 123-155.

### **Week III The Establishment of the State**

March 3 *Mansur and the Establishment of the Abbasid State*

March 5 *The Barmakids*

#### **Reading**

Hugh Kennedy, *The Court of the Caliphs* (London, 2004), 11-50.

### **Week IV: Golden Age**

March 10 *Harun al-Rashid*

March 12 *The Abbasid Civil War: Discussion of El-Hibri's Article*

#### **Readings**

Marshall Hodgson, "Absolutism in Flower, 750-813," *The Venture of Islam* (Chicago, 1974), 280-314.

Tayeb el-Hibri, "The Regicide of the Caliph al-Amin and the Challenge of Representation in Medieval Islamic Historiography," *Arabica*, xlii (1995), 334-364.

### **Week V: Al-Ma'mun**

March 17 *Al-Ma'mun: Profile of a Statesman*

March 19 *Al-Ma'mun: Cultural Achievements: Discussion of Cooperson*

#### **Readings**

Michael Cooperson, *al-Ma'mun* (Oxford, 2005), 81-106.

Ira Lapidus, "Cosmopolitan Islam: the Islam of the Imperial Elite," *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge, 1989), 81-97.

## **Week VI The Caliphate of Samarra'**

March 24 *Al-Mutasim and the Founding of Samarra*

March 26 *The Archaeology of Samarra'*

### Readings

Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, 156-185.

O. S. A. Ismail, "Mutasim and the Turks," *BSOAS* 29(1966), 12-24.

Alastair Northedge. "The Palaces of the Abbasids at Samarra'," *A Medieval City Reconsidered: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Samarra*, ed. Chase Robinson (Oxford, 2001), 29-67.

## **Week VII: Early Abbasid Culture**

March 31 *Al-Jahiz, A Renaissance Man : Discussion of Risalat al-Qiyan*

April 2 *Poetry at the Early Abbasid Court*

### Readings

Hugh Kennedy, *The Court of the Caliphs*, 112-129.

Al-Jahiz, *The Epistle on Singing girls of Jahiz*, ed. and trans. A. F. L. Beeston, pp. 26-38 and 52-64.

April 7

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## **Week VIII The Weakening of the Caliphate**

April 9 *The Anarchy of Samarra' and the Revolt of the Zanj*

April 14 *Internal Crisis and Revival : Discussion of Waines' article*

### Readings

Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, 185-209.

David Waines, "The Third Century Internal Crisis of the Abbasids," *JESCHO* 20 (1977), 282-306.

## **Week IX The Islam of the Religious Elites**

April 21 *The Formations of Sunni traditionalism*

April 23 *Sufism: Islamic Mysticism*

### Readings

Ira Lapidus, "Urban Islam: The Islam of the Religious Elites," *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge, 1989), 98-119.

John Alden Williams, "Interior Religion: Sufism," *The Word of Islam* (Austin, 1994), 109-121.

Margaret Smith, *Rabia* (Oxford, 1994) 19-67.

## **Week X Shiism**

April 28 *The Origins and Early Development of Early Shiism*

April 30 *The Elaboration of Shii Doctrine*

### Reading

Heinz Halm, *Shia Islam: From Religion to Revolution* (Princeton, 1997), 3-37.

### **Week XI The Rise of Local Autonomies: The Buyids and the Hamdanids**

May 5 *The Buyids and the Renaissance of Islam*

May 7 *The Hamdanids, Byzantium and al-Mutanabbi*

#### Readings

Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, 210-243 and 265-282.

A. Hamori, "Al-Mutanabbi," *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Abbasid Belles-Lettres* (Cambridge 1990), 300-314.

### **Week XII Where are Abbasid Women?**

May 12 *Women's History*

May 14 *Abbasid discourse on Women and Gender*

#### Readings

Leila Ahmed, "Elaboration of the Founding Discourses," *Women and Gender in Islam* (Yale, 1992), 79-101.

Hugh Kennedy, "The Harem," *The Court of the Caliph*, 160-199.

Nadia El Cheikh, "Gender and Politics in the Harem of al-Muqtadir," *Gender in the Early Medieval World*, eds. L. Brubaker and Julia Smith (Cambridge, 2004), 147-161.

### **Week XIII Abbasid Institutions**

May 19 *Viziers and Chamberlains*

May 21 *The Muhtasib*

#### Readings

S. D. Goitein, "The Origin of the Vizirate and Its True Character," *Studies in Islamic History and Its Institutions* (Leiden, 1966), 168-193.

R. P. Buckley, "The Muhtasib," *Arabica* 39 (1992), 59-117.

### **Week XIV Revision**

May 26 *Revision*