The American University of Beirut  
History 258AH: Islamic Cities, 600-1500  
W, F 1:00-2:15  
Nicely B2  
Spring Semester 2009-10

J. L. Meloy  
Dept of History and Archaeology  
College Hall 440, ext. 4185  
Office hours: 9:00-10:30 T, Th, and by appointment  
E-mail: jm03@aub.edu.lb

The Course and its Objectives: In this course we will examine the history of cities in the Islamic Near East, or to be more precise, the Islamicate Near East, from the seventh century until the fifteenth century. The urban form has constituted an important component in the societies of this region since the Bronze Age. We will examine the topic of cities as a means to learn about the political and social history of the period from the rise of Islam to the Ottoman conquest. We will undertake a number of field trips to important sites on designated Saturdays. The course has a Moodle website where assigned readings are posted and written assignments should be submitted. A reading packet can be compiled if so desired.

The course is also designed to refine your critical thinking skills, your oral presentation skills, your expository writing skills, and your research skills. To achieve these objectives, we’ll read studies of cities of this region and time period. You will undertake two research projects on cities and present your results in class and as papers. The objective here is to hone these academic skills while learning something about an interesting subject and to get a feel for what historians do. You must keep up with the readings and your consistent attendance is imperative; the class will consist of lecture and discussion and your participation will certainly contribute to your final grade. Late assignments will not be accepted.

Requirements and Grading: Students should complete the assigned readings, and be prepared to discuss them, prior to the week they are assigned. Two projects, both based on your research and analysis, will be assigned during the semester. The first project, of no more than three pages, will be due for presentation in class on Wednesday, March 3. The final project, of no more than fifteen pages, will be due for presentation during the final weeks of the semester, starting Friday, May 14. The papers will be due Saturday, May 29 at 6 pm. Further details will be announced. Late projects and essays will not be accepted. Plagiarism will result in failure. A mid-term will be held the week of April 13 (specific date to be announced). The final course grade will be based on the following: first project (20%), mid-term (20%), final project (30%), final exam (20%), class participation (10%).

Schedule of topics and readings:
Week 1 (15 February): General introduction to the course; Cities and their forms  
General Introduction to the course and its objectives  

Week 2 (22 February): Practical research exercise on understanding towns and cities. Details to be announced.  

Weeks 3 and 4 (1 and 8 March): Project 1 progress reports and presentations.

Week 5 (15 March): The Earliest Cities: Inherited  

Week 6 (22 March): The Earliest Cities: Founded  
Nezar AlSayyad, “Urban Creations of the Early Muslim Arabs,” in Cities and Caliphs, Chapter III.
Week 7 (29 March): Imperial Cities: Baghdad and Samarra
Readings:
Nezar AlSayyad, “Planned Capital Cities,” in Cities and Caliphs, Chapter V, pp. 113-133.

Week 8 (5 April): Imperial Cities: Cairo
Readings:
Andre Raymond, “Cairo, Fatimid City,” Cairo, Chapter 2, pp. 31-79.

Week 9 (12 April): Mid-term and Final Project progress reports

Week 10 (19 April): Cities and Politics
Readings:

Week 11 (26 April): Cities and Religion
Readings:

Week 12 (3 May): Cities and Economy
Reading:

Week 13 (10 May): The Historiography of Cities; Final Project Presentations
Reading:

Weeks 14, and 15 (17 and 24 May): Final project presentations and review. Note: papers will be due Saturday, May 29 at 6 pm.