MES & MELC
Graduate Seminars
Fall 2023
Middle Eastern Studies Seminars
This graduate seminar will concentrate on the influence of Iran, and Persian literary culture, on the intellectual history of Islam in India. A topical organization will be followed rather than a chronological one, although we will also take note of the chronological development that involved: (a) the dominant culture of émigrés from the Iranian plateau during the period of the various Muslim sultanates in India (ca. 1000 to 1500 AD), and (b) the development of a composite (or Indianized) Islamic culture under the Mughal empire (ca. 1500 to 1800). Requirements for the course include extensive readings both from secondary works and from primary sources (in translation), and discussion and evaluation of the readings.
MES 384: Comparative Middle East Law

Dr. Samy Ayoub
Assistant Professor of Middle Eastern Studies
Thursdays 2:00 - 5:00 PM

This seminar explores modern legal structures - legislative and judicial - of the Middle East. It introduces students to the process by which traditional Islamic law was transformed into state law in the 19th and 20th centuries CE, by investigating debates on codification, legal modernity, and legal borrowing. With the emergence of the modern nation-states across the Muslim World, many countries accorded constitutional status to Islamic law as “a source” or “the source” of law and some states purport to base their entire systems on versions of Islamic law. The formation of the modern legal regimes in the Middle East was a hybrid product of Islamic and western legal traditions, which raises questions about legal authority, legality, and the creation of modern legal and judicial institutions. The course aims to encourage comparative legal analysis to assess generalizations about law typically formulated with respect to Western legal traditions. The course discusses cases and codes from Egypt, Israel, Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. The topics covered in this course are constitutional law, judicial review, administrative law, obligations, commercial law, family law, human rights, and criminal law.
This course will provide students with a comprehensive understanding of the history of nationalisms in the Modern Middle East. Students will learn theories, methods and debates associated with nationalism, the particular histories of national and translational manifestations of nationalism, (including Turkish, Iranian, Israeli, and Arab Nationalisms, as well, the nationalisms of minorities in the region, and thematic topics such as race and ethnicity, gender, historiography, and religion. This course will also introduce students to many of the broader debates in the field of Modern Middle Eastern history. Students will read, analyze, and discuss selected titles from a list of influential scholarly books and articles on nationalism in the Middle East and elsewhere. While no specific foreign languages skills are required, readings in primary historical documents will be required as part of each student’s research project (in the original languages, when possible). One of the primary goals of the course is to give students the necessary research, and writing skills, along with the requisite knowledge of the field, to conduct meaningful research in the area of History.
In this graduate seminar we dive into the rich world of pre-modern Islamic humanities, exploring the traditions that formed the culture of an educated Muslim (almost-always) man. Students will familiarize themselves with Arabic writings ranging from linguistics and logic to literature, history, poetic criticism and adab – a category that defies modern classification but includes discussions of poetry, language and theology. Texts include Sibawayh, Jahiz, Tawhidi, Ibn Rashiq, Farabi, Avicenna, Jurjani, Ibn Khaldun, and more. Prerequisite: three years of Arabic at the university level (two years with instructor’s permission).
Middle Eastern Languages & Cultures Seminars
This course allows students who have completed at least a year of Akkadian to read selected cuneiform texts, usually drawn from the Old Babylonian, Neo-Assyrian, and Neo-Babylonian periods. Some texts containing peripheral Akkadian (e.g., from Emar, Nuzi) may be introduced as well. Students will also move into making full use of the standard Assyriological tools in this course.
Coptic Language and Literature

MEL 380C: Coptic Language and Literature

Dr. Geoffrey Smith
Associate Professor of Religious Studies; Director, Institute for the Study of Antiquity and Christian Origins (ISAC)

TTH 9:30 - 11:00 AM

The origins of the Coptic language are somewhat mysterious. It emerged in the first and second centuries CE, when a small group of linguistic innovators began to transliterate the Egyptian language into Greek characters along with a few letterforms borrowed from demotic. The language increased in popularity and flourished from the fourth through seventh centuries among Christians in Egypt. Many late antique Egyptian Christians read the bible in Coptic translation, and composed literature, magical texts, and private letters in the language as well. Coptic was even used sporadically as the language of bureaucracy. While Coptic is no longer spoken today, it lives on as one of the liturgical languages of the Coptic Orthodox Church. This course will introduce students to the fundamentals of Coptic grammar and familiarize them with many of the texts that survive in the language. Students will also become familiar with the circumstances of discovery and contents of some of the major hoards of Coptic manuscripts, such as the finds at Dishna, Kellis, Nag Hammadi, Oxyrhynchus, and the monastery of the archangel Michael and the White Monastery. Finally, students will become acquainted with topics of special interest among Coptic scholars today, such as paleography, dialectology, and bilingualism.
This course trains students to read and analyze a sizable amount of textual data from the Hebrew Bible. We will read approximately 30 pages of the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia every week, with the aim that students will recognize what is grammatically unusual in the text. The course covers the Deuteronomistic History (Joshua–Kings) and the Books of Chronicles. In addition to reading Hebrew and working on the questions and issues that arise from working through the texts, we will survey the fundamental principles of the historical grammar of Biblical Hebrew, situate the language in its Northwest-Semitic context, and reconstruct various stages of Hebrew grammar.
This course focuses on the language of the alphabetic texts from the ancient city of Ugarit, present-day Ras Shamra, Syria. In addition to introducing Ugaritic grammar and its alphabetic script, the course will survey texts from a variety of genres and devote some attention to the history of the Late-Bronze city-state of Ugarit from which they derive.
This seminar examines the literature and material culture of Second Temple Judaism (ca. 520 BCE – 70 CE) in dialogue with some of the most recent and cutting-edge scholarship on Jews and Judaism in Persian, Hellenistic, and early Roman contexts. In contrast to traditional, mainstream approaches, the seminar encourages students to develop a holistic picture of the diversity of Jewish religious experiences in this period through five critical interventions: first, challenging problematic divisions of literature by canon and corpus (e.g., Hebrew Bible, New Testament, Pseudepigrapha, Apocrypha, Dead Sea Scrolls), genre (e.g., prophecy, apocalypse, wisdom), language (e.g., Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek), and sect (e.g., Pharisees, Essenes, Christ followers); second, integrating the study of literature with documentary texts, inscriptions, and other material culture, and thus sources representing non-elites with those representing elites as well as ideas with practices; third, carefully contextualizing each text and artifact in relation to proximate non-Jewish literature and material culture; fourth, recognizing interactions between the Jerusalem Temple and diaspora Jewish communities without conceptualizing diaspora Judaism as subsidiary or deviant; and fifth, complicating unilateral models of cultural change and imperialism (e.g., Hellenization, Romanization), particularly as they pertain to religion and ethnicity.
If you have questions about our Fall 2023 courses, please contact the Graduate Program Coordinator Taylor Peterson
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The image shows three fennec foxes, delightful creatures native to the deserts of North Africa. The image was taken by Zetong Li and used in accordance with the unsplash.com free-to-use license.