

Instructor: Yasir Yilmaz

Course title: Middle East from Muhammad to Napoleon

Course objectives:

This course will introduce students to the history of the Middle East starting with the birth of Islam in the seventh century to the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt at the end of the eighteenth century. During the semester, we will cover various phases of the pre-modern Middle Eastern history, including the expansion of the early Islamic empire, the crusades and the Mongolic invasion of the Islamic Middle East, the emergence of the Ottoman Empire and its gradual weakening. The course also aims to introduce students to some of the key personalities in pre-modern Islamic history, including philosophers, men of letters, and influential political figures. At the end, students are expected to cultivate a general understanding of Middle Eastern and Islamic history before the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt and be able to critically think about the historical origins of many present-day global issues concerning the Muslim societies.

The following are some of the questions discussed during the semester:

- Who is the Islamic Muhammad and historical Muhammad? How are they similar and different?
- How was Islam born and how did it grow into a world religion in a span of two centuries?
- How did the spread of Islam influence European civilization?
- What are the theological doctrines of Islam?
- What did the Islamic civilization achieve during its Golden Age roughly between 800 and 1100?
- What were the main theological debates in early Islam and how did those debates determine the later development of Muslim communities? What is the meaning of terms such as Sunni, Shia, sefehi, caliph, or caliphate?
- What are the historical roles of Arabs, Iranians, Turks, and the states they have established from Iberia to Central Asia in the historical formation of the Middle East?