

City University of New York (CUNY)

## CUNY Academic Works

---

Open Educational Resources

Queens College

---

2021

### MES 160: Classical Islamic Literature & Civilization

Kirsten Beck

*CUNY Queens College*, [kbeck@qc.cuny.edu](mailto:kbeck@qc.cuny.edu)

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: [https://academicworks.cuny.edu/qc\\_oers/41](https://academicworks.cuny.edu/qc_oers/41)

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

---

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).

Contact: [AcademicWorks@cuny.edu](mailto:AcademicWorks@cuny.edu)

# Classical Islamic Literature & Civilization

MES 160 - Fall 2021 - Queens College

**Instructor:** Prof. Kirsten Beck

**Classroom:** Our **QWriting Site** + Google Classroom (See page 3 below)

**Phone/Zoom Meetings:** Tuesdays and Wednesdays 10:30am-12pm  
(just ask to speak by phone or zoom—in an email that follows proper etiquette)

**E-Mail:** Kirsten.Beck@qc.cuny.edu

In this course, we will take a journey through history, literature, and ideas, traveling through Islamic civilization from 600-1250 CE. We will learn about and contemplate the major events and concerns of Islamic civilization, from the dawn of Islam through the expansions, transformations, and fragmentations of Islamic empires, up until the end of the 13th century. Works of Islamic literature from a variety of genres will fuel our journey. Along the way, we will learn how we might respond to questions such as: Why did poetry matter so much? What did poets write about? Was history considered to be different from literature? What kind of identities mattered to people living in the medieval Islamic world?

This course is designed for students who have **no previous background in Islamic History, Civilization, or Literature** and is **asynchronous**. Lectures are not live. Instead, they are recorded for you to watch on your own schedule. You must still commit to deadlines for submissions (Thursdays by 4pm!), but you can complete readings and watch the required lectures at your convenience. Best of all, you can return to them whenever you'd like, even during exams!

**Course Materials:** Good news! This is a Zero Textbook Cost (ZTC) course. There is no required textbook, and all required readings will be provided free of charge through the course site. Lectures **are required** and will also be available through our course site. **Be sure to have access to our course site (see "Required Tools and Accounts" on page 3 below) before the first day of classes.**

## Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, you will:

- LO1: Be familiar with major debates in Islamic intellectual history through the 13th century;
- LO2: Be able to identify and define key events, personalities, and literary genres in Islamic history;
- LO3: Be able to understand and appreciate pre-Islamic, early Islamic, and classical Islamic poetry; and
- LO4: Have expressed, demonstrated, and integrated this knowledge.

## Course Components

- **Readings: (Every week)** Before the lecture each week, you will do some preparatory reading. Reading material for the course consists of short excerpts from history textbooks, scholarly articles, readings from a variety of classical Islamic literary genres, and excerpts from the Qur'an. Most readings are required, and these will be indicated by an asterisk in our schedule.
- **Lectures: (Every week)** Each week, you will watch a pre-recorded video lecture that will guide you through the readings and provide cultural, political, and material contexts.
- **Quizzes: (Weeks 2, 3, 5-9, 11)** On these weeks, after watching and taking notes on the lecture, take the week's quiz. **Due on Thursday by 4pm**, each quiz will include multiple-choice and/or short-answer questions. These questions will be based on the required reading and lecture for that week. You can and should refer to your notes, as well as the lecture and readings as you work on the quiz. **On each quiz, you will be given space to ask questions you'd like me to address from the lecture or readings!** Quiz 8 will be extra credit—you can earn between 1 and 3 points on your FINAL grade.
- **Poetry Annotations 30%: (Weeks 4, 10, 12)** **Due on Thursday by 4pm three times during the semester**, you will be asked to work in a group to annotate one poem from the week's readings. You will use Hypothesis to make notes and commentary, add explanations and historical context, express your personal take and opinion, and respond to your group-mates' annotations. The assigned lectures will teach you how to annotate a poem, and you should consult this sample for reference. Be sure to triple-check your spelling and grammar on these. Remind your group-mates to look out for one another by also checking.
- **Practice Annotation 5%: (Week 2)** You must familiarize yourself with Hypothesis ahead of the first poetry annotation assignment by adding a single annotation to our very first reading (Eugene Berger et al., World History Cultures, States, and Societies to 1500—7.6: Byzantium - The Age of Justinian). For full credit, simply post one question/comment as your annotation and include your FULL NAME at the start of your question/comment by **Thursday, September 2 by 4pm**. **See "Using Hypothesis."**
- **Final Project 25%: (Week 15)** On **December 16 by 4pm**, you will submit your final project: an epistolary reflection on the course. Write a 500-word letter to a family member or friend in which you connect what you learned this semester in MES 160 to your life—your goals, struggles, identity, concerns, motivations, etc. Provide details from your life and from the course to convey to your family member or friend how the course has shaped your thinking or relates to your past experiences. This letter should be addressed to someone close to you. Correct spelling and grammar are required. For some terms, you may need to check your lecture notes or reading to see how they are spelled. You should revise your letter for clarity before submitting. You need not send the letter to the addressee, but you are encouraged to do so.
- **Zoom Meetings: (Weeks 9, 13)** Twice this semester we will meet on Zoom to check in with one another. We will discuss questions you may have about the course material, talk about the annotations, and discuss the final project. These meetings are both **optional** and will be scheduled after the first week of the semester.

## Contacting Prof. Beck

- Any email communication with the instructor will be through your Queens College email account. Emails coming from other accounts will not be read. You are thus encouraged to use your QC email account only and regularly check their email.
- During the week, I will check e-mail and classroom comments on a regular basis. If you have a concern and send me a message through the Google Classroom, you can expect a response within 48 hours on business days. If you send an email, make sure that you use proper etiquette (see link on page 1) and include in the email subject the class name, section, and your question. For example: Email **Subject: MES160-02 Inquiry.**

## Final Grade Components

Practice Annotation 5%  
 Post-Lecture Quizzes 40%  
 Poetry Annotations 30%  
 Final Project 25%

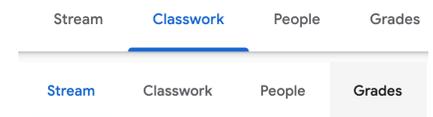
## Required Tools and Accounts

- An active Queens College email account ([what & how](#))
- QC G Suite for Education account ([what & how](#))
  - [Activate Queens College G-Suite Account](#)
    - Visit <http://gdrive.qc.cuny.edu>
    - Use your QC credentials (e.g., jsmith & the password for your QC email/campus wifi)
  - [Join our Google Classroom](#)
    - Once you have an active QC G-Suite account, visit <https://classroom.google.com/>,
    - Click on the “plus” sign in the upper right corner, and choose “join class.”

You may join our Google Classroom with this code - **To Be Announced.**

## Using Google Classroom:

- Use the “**Classwork**” tab to view assignments, course materials, lectures, this syllabus, and our Class Calendar
- Use the “**Stream**” tab as if it is a classroom. I will post announcements there and respond to questions from emails and private classroom comments.



Grading Scale	
Exceptional	A+ (97-100)
Excellent	A (93-96), A- (90-92)
Very Good	B+ (87-89), B (83-86), B- (80-82)
Satisfactory	C+ (77-79), C (73-76)
Poor	C- (70-72), D+ (67-69), D (60-66), D- (0-59)
Failure	F (0-59)

## MISSED WORK POLICY

**Late work cannot be received for credit or feedback—no exceptions. However, two low quiz scores WILL BE DROPPED in calculating your final grade to accommodate difficulties and unexpected delays that arise over the course of the semester.**

**I will not respond to requests to accept late work, but I appreciate a note by email when you miss an assignment.**

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:**

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should register with and provide documentation to the Office of Special Services. The Office of Special Services will provide a letter for you to give to me indicating the need for accommodation and the nature of it. This should be done during the first week of class. For more information about services available to Queens College students, contact the Office of Special Services (718-997-5870) or visit their website (<http://sl.qc.cuny.edu/oss/>).

**Collegiality and Mutual Respect:**

You and your classmates may have strongly held personal opinions on different sides of a given topic. Please express your opinions but be respectful of your fellow classmates even when you strongly disagree. Follow the adage that sometimes we must agree to disagree agreeably.

**PLEASE NOTE THAT THE TERMS OF THIS SYLLABUS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE**

**Schedule of Topics and Work**  
**(Subject to Change, Check Google Classroom for Updates)**

	Reading (*=Required)	Lecture (Required)	Weekly Submission (Required) Due Thursdays at 4pm
<b>The Pre-Islamic &amp; Early Islamic Periods</b>			
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• *Syllabus</li> </ul>	Lecture One: Course Introduction	None
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• *Eugene Berger et al., <i>World History Cultures, States, and Societies to 1500</i> (pp. 271-277; 278-280; 299) <a href="#">Link</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 7.6: Byzantium - The Age of Justinian</li> <li>○ 7.7: Perspectives - Post-Roman East and West</li> <li>○ 7.9: Byzantium - Crisis and Recovery</li> <li>○ 8.5: Geography of the Middle East</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Alam Payind and Melinda McClimans, <i>Keys to Understanding the Middle East</i> (pp. viii-xi, 28-30) <a href="#">Link</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “Defining the Middle East”</li> <li>○ “Common Misconceptions”</li> <li>○ “Arabic’s Influence in the Region”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Lecture Two: Setting the Stage: The Pre-Islamic Middle East	QUIZ 1 + Practice Annotation
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trinidad Rico, Ed., <i>The Making of Islamic Heritage</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ R. Michael Feener, <i>Muslim Cultures and Pre-Islamic Pasts: Changing Perceptions of “Heritage”</i> (pp. 23-46) <a href="#">Link</a></li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Lecture Three: Pre-Islamic Arabia and Its Poetry	QUIZ 2
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• *Stetkevyych, “Sacrifice and Redemption in Early Islamic Poetry: Al-Ḥuṭay’ah’s ‘Wretched Hunter,’” pp. 89-90 <a href="#">Library</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ al-Hutay’ah’s poem</li> </ul> </li> <li>• *Van Gelder, <i>Classical Arabic Literature : A Library of Arabic Literature Anthology</i>, pp. 2-14 <a href="#">Library</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ A Qaṣīdah by ‘Abīd ibn al-Abrāṣ</li> <li>○ A Qaṣīdah by ‘Alqamah ibn ‘Abadah</li> <li>○ A Qaṣīdah by al-Muthaqqib al-‘Abdī</li> <li>○ An Elegy (Marthiyah) by al-Khansā’</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Lecture Four: Reading Pre- Islamic Poetry	Group Annotations of Poetry
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• *Quran Corpus (<a href="https://quran.com/">https://quran.com/</a>) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="#">Sura 1</a> (Sūrat al-Fatīḥah)</li> <li>○ <a href="#">Sura 53:1-18</a> (Sūrat al-Najm)</li> <li>○ <a href="#">Sura 82</a> (Sūrat al-Infīṭār)</li> <li>○ <a href="#">Sura 91</a> (Sūrat al-Shams)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• For annotation of the suras’ grammar, syntax and morphology, also consult: <a href="https://corpus.quran.com/">https://corpus.quran.com/</a></li> </ul>	Lecture Five: Revelation, the Qur’an, and Hadith	QUIZ 3

6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• *Eugene Berger et al., <i>World History Cultures, States, and Societies to 1500</i> (pp. 299-314) <a href="#">Link</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 8.6: The Rise of Islam</li> <li>○ 8.7: The Expansion of Islam</li> <li>○ 8.8: The Rashidun Caliphs</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Ibn Khaldoun (Franz Rosenthal, trans.) <i>The Muqaddimah</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ III.28: Succession <a href="#">Link</a></li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Lecture Six: Succession: The Rashidun Caliphs	QUIZ 4
<b>The Umayyad &amp; Abbasid Periods</b>			
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• *Eugene Berger et al., <i>World History Cultures, States, and Societies to 1500</i> (pp. 314-319) <a href="#">Link</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 8.9: The Umayyad Caliphate</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The Events of the Year 41 (661/662) (pp. 7-14) <a href="#">Link</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Al-Hasan's surrender of al-Kufah to Mu`awiyah</li> <li>○ The departure of al-Hasan and al-Husayn for al-Madinah</li> <li>○ The Kharijites at Shahrzur</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Lecture Seven: The Umayyad Caliphate	QUIZ 5
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bulliet, <i>Islam: The View from the Edge</i> (pp. 37-66) <a href="#">Link</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ "The View from the Edge"</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Lecture Eight: Islamic Conversion	QUIZ 6
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• *Eugene Berger et al., <i>World History Cultures, States, and Societies to 1500</i> (pp. 319-325) <a href="#">Link</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 8.10: The Umayyad Caliphate</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Lecture Nine: The Abbasid Caliphate	QUIZ 7
<b>Umayyad &amp; Abbasid Poetry and Prose</b>			
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• *Van Gelder, <i>Classical Arabic Literature : A Library of Arabic Literature Anthology</i>, pp. 14-30 <a href="#">Library</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Polemics in Verse: An Invective Qaṣīdah by al-Akḥṭal and a Reply by Jarīr</li> <li>○ Love in the Desert: A Qaṣīdah by Dhū l-Rummah</li> <li>○ An Umayyad Ghazal Poem, used as an Abbasid Song Text</li> <li>○ An ‘Udhrī Ghazal attributed to Majnūn Laylā</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Lecture Seven: Umayyad and early Abbasid Poetry	Group Annotations of Poetry
11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• *Van Gelder, <i>Classical Arabic Literature : A Library of Arabic Literature Anthology</i>, pp. 208-217, 243-244 <a href="#">Library</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ History as Literature: Al-Amīn and al-Ma`mūn, the Sons of Hārūn al-Rashīd</li> <li>○ Prose Narrative: "The Caliph al-Mu`taḍid as Detective" by al-Tanūkhī</li> </ul> </li> <li>• *William H. McNeill and Marilyn Robinson Waldman, eds., <i>The Islamic World</i>, pp. 142-150 <a href="#">Link</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Excerpt from al-Ṭabarī's History of Prophets and Kings</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Lecture Nine: Abbasid Prose	Extra Credit QUIZ 8

12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• *Van Gelder, <i>Classical Arabic Literature : A Library of Arabic Literature Anthology</i>, pp. 37-64 <a href="#">Library</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ A Modern (Muḥdath) Ghazal Epigram by Abū Nuwās</li> <li>○ A Ghazal by Abū Nuwās: On a Boy Called ‘Alī</li> <li>○ Two wine Poems by Abū Nuwās</li> <li>○ A Lampooning Epigram (Hijā’) by Abū Nuwās</li> <li>○ Three Love Epigrams by ‘Ulayyah bint al-Mahdī</li> <li>○ A Poem of Asceticism (Zuhdiyyah) by Abū l-‘Atāhiyah</li> <li>○ A Qaṣīdah by Ibn al-Rūmī: A Party at ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Ṣāliḥ al-Hāshimī’s</li> <li>○ A Victory Ode by al-Mutanabbī: The Qaṣīdah on Sayf al-Dawlah’s Recapture of the Fortress of al-Ḥadath</li> </ul> </li> <li>• *Julia Ashtiany, ed., <i>Abbasid Belles Lettres</i>, pp. 159-161 <a href="#">Link</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ode to Amorium by Abū Tammām (Translation by M.M.Badawi)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Lecture Ten: Abbasid Poetry	Group Annotations of Poetry
<b>Communities &amp; Identities throughout the Abbasid Empire</b>			
13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• *Van Gelder, <i>Classical Arabic Literature : A Library of Arabic Literature Anthology</i>, pp. 34-36, 195-207 <a href="#">Library</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Anti-Arab, Pro-Iranian Lampoon (Hijā’) by Bashshār ibn Burd</li> <li>○ Essayistic Prose: Al-Tawḥīdī on the Superiority of the Arabs</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Lecture Eleven: The Shu’ubiyah and Arabiyyah Movements	Work on Final Project
14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• *Jim Colville, <i>Sobriety and Mirth</i>, pp. 25-51 <a href="#">Link</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The Superiority of Blacks to Whites</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Lecture Twelve: Race in Abbasid- Era Islamic Society	Work on Final Project
15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>	Lecture Thirteen: What is Islam? What is Islamic? And what does it mean to study Islam?	Submit Final Project