John Schoeberlein
The Meanings of Islam in Central Asia (Islamic Civilizations 160)
Syllabus for the course offered in Spring 2001
Harvard University
Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations

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**Islamic Civilizations 160.**

**The Meanings of Islam in Central Asia**

Spring term, Wednesdays, 2:00 - 4:00 plus an additional meeting time to be arranged. Coolidge Hall, Room 215.

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Office hours: Tuesdays, 2:00 - 4:00 and by appointment.

**Course Description**

The course will examine the changing role of Islam in Central Asia through history from a multi-disciplinary perspective. Central Asia is on the margins of the Islamic world, though integral to it, and the course will consider the ways that the regions’ position on transcontinental trade routes and desert-oasis borderlands have led to particular expressions of the processes which are common to the Islamic world more widely. It will also look at the process of modernization and the role of Islam in the Russian and Soviet imperial contexts. Particular attention will be given to the current political, cultural and social processes in which Islam plays a part in the post-Soviet era.

*Note:* The course is intended primarily for advanced undergraduates and graduate students; Some background in Central Asia and/or Islamic civilization is preferable, though not required. Enrollment may be limited.

**Themes and Objectives of the Course**

Some see Central Asia as defined by Islam. Indeed, there is a tendency to consider that every aspect of life in an “Islamic society” is Islamic. By contrast, in other cases, religion is referenced mainly in relation to religious activities, morals, and historical influences. In Central Asia, we find reference to everything from “Muslim language” (tsarist period sources, referring collectively to all the languages spoken by the “natives”) to the “Islamic threat” (common in Sovietology and now again in the post-Soviet Russian literature). Central Asian Muslims themselves refer to their Muslim customs, dress, mind-set, etc. And throughout the Islamic world, there is an assumption — as well as those who challenge it — that in an Islamic society, there *should* be a specific set Islamic institutions, including Islamic Law (Shari’a), Islamic marriage (assuming specific relations between man and woman), Islamic morality, etc. — all dictated by the fundamental Islamic texts: the Quran and the Hadith — and the schools of their interpretation.

In this course, we will explore the many realms in which two concepts come together: “Central Asia” and “Islam”. We will look at a range of understandings of Islam, as represented by those who adhere to it, those who analyze it, those who distrust and fear it, and those who romanticize and “orientalize” it. We will explore the domains in which Islam figures in the lives
of Central Asians, and the forms that this takes, in their great diversity across space, time and social domains. These include religious observance, concepts of cosmic and moral order, activities of everyday life, social organization and institutions, “culture”, and as a principal of political organization and mobilization.

In this wide frame, the participants in the course will have the opportunity to develop a broad knowledge of Central Asian Islam, while identifying particular themes which they wish to explore in greater depth in their papers and class presentations.

The following major themes will be covered:

1) The historical development and diversity of Islamic civilization in Central Asia.
2) Islam under the rule of the Russian empire, the Soviet Union, and independent states.
3) Islam and its relations to other traditions: Issues of conversion, syncretism, and confrontation with other religious traditions and belief systems.
4) Islam as religion and belief system: Central Asia’s role in the broader traditions, schools, orders and reform movements.
5) Islamic principles of social order: Hereditary roles, teachers, judges, healers, Islamic principles of authority, of community, of family relations, and of government and participation.
6) Islam as way of life: Ritual practice, principles of daily behavior, family relations, gender relations.
7) Islam as a principle and structure of political mobilization: Islamic opposition, statehood, reform, and Fundamentalism; Role of Islamic movements in relation to secular, non-Islamic, or anti-Islamic regimes.

Requirements

The format of this course is primarily as a seminar. Though occasionally there will be lectures to lay out the background which will assist in the readings and discussion, mainly we will be exploring concepts and cases as they may be understood from the available sources. In addition to readings, sources may include occasional invited speakers and the field experience of course participants.

The majority of class time will be devoted to discussion. The students will each define for themselves what particular areas and themes they personally wish to explore in greatest depth. There will be limited regular assigned readings on a given theme, but students will also be expected to explore the sources more deeply depending on the particular topics on which they have chosen to focus. Those who can make use of sources in Russian, Central Asian, or other languages will be encouraged to do so. During most class meetings, specific students will assume responsibility for leading discussion. The student(s) responsible for the given topic will explore the sources in greater depth, give careful thought to how the topic should be explored,
and lead class discussion. They may prepare a short presentation of their thoughts on the key issues, a hand-out of discussion points, and/or other materials.

Evaluation of the student’s performance in the course will be based on the following:

1) Presentation and leading of discussion: Several times in the course of the semester, each student will have responsibility for preparation and presentation of comments and discussion points on a given topic.

2) Participation: Each student is expected to keep current on the readings and to make regular, constructive contributions to discussions.

3) Papers: Each student will write two short papers in the course of the semester, addressing different themes. These will not be exhaustive studies, but rather thematic explorations. A “short” paper is in the neighborhood of 15 pages, though the length should be determined by what is appropriate for the chosen topic. Topics are selected in consultation with the instructor (it is your responsibility to begin early enough so you find the subject and materials which are suitable). The first paper will be due on **Friday, March 23** (which is just before Spring Break; if you don’t mind spoiling your break with it, you may submit it on Monday, April 2). The second paper is due on **May 16** (the last day of reading period; no exceptions). Graduate students may submit a single paper in place of the two, as they wish. However, in this case, they must submit a detailed outline of the paper by **Friday, April 10**.

**Readings**

Assigned readings will be made available as photocopies (they may be picked up in the Central Asian Studies Program Office: Coolidge Hall, room 224A). We will collect money in order to cover the cost of photo-copying. The weekly plan of readings will be made available after we learn of the specific interests and level of experience of the students in the class. The reading load will be about 3-4 articles or book chapters per week.

**Week of February 12**

**Part 1: Central Asia Islam in the Context of the “Islamic World”**

Gellner, Ernest

Eickelman, Dale F.
Part 2: Islam in Central Asia: Historical Background

Bennigsen, Alexandre A. and S. Enders Wimbush

Lapidus, Ira Marvin
Cambridge, Eng./New York: Cambridge University Press.

Foltz, Richard

Week of February 19

Situating Central Asian Islam

Bregel, Yuri

Esposito, John L.

Saroyan, Mark

Week of February 26

Islam and Identity

Lemercier-Quelquejay, Chantal


Gladney, Dru C.
Khalid, Adeeb

**Week of March 5**

**Islamization**

DeWeese, Devin

Golden, Peter B.

Snesarev, Gleb Pavlovich

**Week of March 19**

**Islam and Social Order**

McChesney, Robert Duncan

Togan, İsenbike

Tett, Gillian
Week of April 2

Muslim Belief

Algar, Hamid
1990 “A brief history of the Naqshbandi Order,” in Naqshbandis: Cheminements et situation actuelle d’un ordre mystique Musulman, p.3-44. Istanbul/Paris: ISIS.

Babadzhano, Bakhtiyar

Hizb ut-Tahrir

Week of April 9

Islam and Political Mobilization

Olcott, Martha Brill

Manz, Beatrice Forbes

Ignatenko, Aleksandr

Atkin, Muriel

International Crisis Group
Week of April 16

Islam and Conflict

Polat, Abdumannob

Atkin, Muriel

Also refer back to the ICG Report on Islamist Mobilization and Regional Security.

Week of April 23

Women and Islam in Changing Societies

Tokhtakhojaeva, Marfua

Poliakov, Sergei P.

Michaels, Paula A.

Tohidi, Nayereh

Week of April 30

Islam and Post-Soviet State Building

Karimov, Islam
Goble, Paul

Hunter, Shireen Tahmaseeb

Shahrani, M. Nazif Mohib