Violence in Islamic History
HIST 78110; MES 73500; WSCP 81000
Zoom class meetings Wednesdays 6:30-7:30pm

[In addition to synchronous meetings, asynchronous discussions will be conducted on the course forum.]

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In this course, we will consider a wide range of examples of violence in Islamic history, primarily in premodern times. Our main focus will be on religious dimensions of violence. Throughout the class, we will be discussing a range of methodological issues such as violence as an analytical concept and violence as an ethical challenge for historians. Recent public debates and much scholarship concentrate on religiously validated public violence in Islamic contexts, especially the ‘inter-state’ violence of conquests and wars. Such violence is widely associated with the concept of jihad and sometimes described as ‘holy war’. While we will be exploring these high-profile subjects, this class will expand its perspective on violence by considering cases that unfold in the context of war, but are not part of combat. We will be discussing enslavement, especially with regard to its gendered dimension. While some enslaved men became soldiers and took on a new role in the exercise of violence, women often became concubines and were subjected to sexual violence. Furthermore, we will be discussing public violence in the context of riots, executions and public corporal punishments such as flogging. A second set of topics is derived from what may be considered the private sphere. In this context, we will mostly be looking at Islamic law and the way legal scholars understood and approached domestic violence. Apart from violence against wives we will be considering violence against enslaved individuals in private households. To expand our discussion of Islamic law, we will be considering other examples of interpersonal violence, in particular homicide. While most of our material will be textual, a small number of visual sources will be discussed as well, especially with regard to an aestheticization of violence. Depending on student interest, other cases of violence such as violence against the self and violence against non-human animals can be taken into account as well. This course is suitable for students without prior knowledge of Islamic history.

Assignments

Contributions to course forum and class discussion (40%): Students should prepare all required readings in such a way that they are able to summarize and discuss them. Students should also submit posts to the course forum in preparation of weekly meetings highlighting issues they would like to discuss or that were especially noteworthy in the readings.

Book review (15%): Students should select an academic book of their choice, but related to the course topic. Single- or multiple-author monographs as well as edited volumes are all acceptable. The book review should be 700-1000 words long and be uploaded to the course website by October 31.

Final paper (45%): Students should select a topic related to the subject of the course and write an academic paper of 4,000 words. The essay should reflect original research and be written in clear academic prose.
General bibliography

Religion and violence
Andrew R. Murphy (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Religion and Violence* (Chichester, 2011).

Violence in Islamic history
Robert Gleave and István T. Kristó-Nagy (eds), *Violence in Islamic Thought from the Qur’an to the Mongols* (Edinburgh, 2015). @GC
Delfina Serrano Ruano (ed.), *Crueldad y compasión en la literatura árabe e islámica* (Madrid, 2011).

Jihad
John Kelsay and James Turner Johnson (eds), *Just War and Jihad. Historical and Theoretical Perspectives on War and Peace in Western and Islamic Traditions* (New York, 1991).


**Theories of Violence**


Todd K. Shakelford and Viviana A. Weekes-Shakelford (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Evolutionary Perspectives on Violence, Homicide, and War* (Oxford, 2012). @GC


**Islamic History and Islamic Law**

Peri Bearman and Rudolph Peters (eds), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Islamic Law* (Farnham, 2014). @NYPL

Michael Cook (general editor), *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, 6 vols (Cambridge, 2010). [Volume 4 contains chapters on a range of traditions within Islam and topics in Islamic history.] @GC

Armando Salvatore et al (eds), *The Wiley Blackwell History of Islam* (Chichester, 2018). @GC

**Schedule**

1) **Introduction; preliminary discussion, definitions of violence** (August 26)

2) **Qur’an; religion and violence** (September 2)

   *This meeting has a two-fold purpose. We will be discussing the Qur’an as a historical document and as the key text of the Islamic religion. We will also look into theories about the relationship between religion and violence and explore what kind of questions we can ask about the Qur’an, the subject of violence in the Qur’an and the implications of relevant statements. In addition to passages from the Qur’an, we will be looking at the so-called Constitution of Medina, another early document in Islamic history.*
3) Conquests and military violence I (September 9)

In this and the next meeting, we will be considering the earliest examples of religiously validated large-scale violence in Islamic history, the Arab-Muslim conquests of the mid-seventh century. In the first meeting, we will be establishing the historical framework for these conquests, including the ways in which they are embedded in the violence of late antiquity.

*Thomas Sizgorich, Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity. Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam (Philadelphia, 2008), chapters 5 and 6 (pp. 144-195). GC

*Robert G. Hoyland, In God’s Path. The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire (Oxford, 2015), introduction and chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 1-65). GC

G.W. Bowersock, Empires in Collision in Late Antiquity (Waltham, 2012). GC

Paul Stephenson, ‘Religious Services for Byzantine Soldiers and the Possibility of Martyrdom, c. 400-c. 1000’, in Hashmi (ed.), Just Wars, 25-46. @ac


4) Conquests and military violence II (September 16)
In the second part of this section, we will be considering cases of violence subsequent to the Arab-Muslim conquests, especially in the larger Iranian world, and the relationship between the conquests and later Islamic laws on warfare.

*Patricia Crone, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran. Rural Revolt and Local Zoroastrianism* (Cambridge, 2012). Everybody read the chapter on Bābak (chapter 3, pages 46-76. In addition to that, please select another of the revolt chapters (chapters 2, 4, 5, 6 or 7). @GC


*Khaled Abou al-Fadl, ‘The Rules of Killing at War: An Inquiry into Classical Sources,’ *Muslim World* 89 (1999), 144-157. @GC

*Matthias Vanhullebusch, ‘On the Abodes of War and Peace in the Islamic Law of War: Fact or Fiction?’, in Ignacio de la Rasilla del Moral and Ayesha Shahid (eds), *International Law and Islam. Historical Explorations* (Leiden, 2018), 277-308. @NYPL


Lena Salaymeh, ‘Early Islamic Legal-Historical Precedents: Prisoners of War’, *Law and History Review* 26/3 (2008), 521-544. @GC

John Kelsay, ‘Al-Shaybani and the Islamic Law of War’, *Journal of Military Ethics* 2/1 (2003), 63-75. @GC


https://brill.com/view/title/31941

5) **Enslavement I: enslaved women at Abbasid courts** (September 23)

In this and the following sections we will focus on enslavement as a form of violence. Two examples will be explored. The first section focuses on enslaved women, primarily during the Abbasid period, in particular women who were trained in various cultural skills and interacted with people of the ruling classes. For a bibliography on the subject of slavery in Islamic history, please see the syllabus for the Spring 2019 class.
*Matthew S. Gordon and Kathryn A. Hain (eds), *Concubines and Courtesans. Women and Slavery in Islamic History* (Oxford, 2017), introduction and chapters 1-4. @GC

*Kecia Ali, ‘Concubinage and Consent’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 49 (2017), 148-152. @GC

*Fuad Matthew Caswell, *The Slave Girls of Baghdad. The Qiyān in the Early Abbasid Era* (London, 2011), chapters one (‘The Social Scene’, 10-36) and chapter three, the section about ‘Inān (56-81). @ac


6) **Enslavement II: enslaved soldiers** (September 30)

_In this section, we will be looking at enslaved men who were employed as mercenaries. We will be discussing the case of these men as both victims and agents of violence._


*Matthew S. Gordon, ‘The Turkish Officers of Samarra. Revenue and the Exercise of Authority’, in *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 42/2 (1999), 466-493. @GC


7) **Riots** (October 7)

_In this section, we will be exploring riots as a way in which violent means were used as a form of collective political expression. This meeting focuses on violence among Muslims. Examples of public violence against non-Muslims can be explored in case of interest (see list of possible topics in final meeting)._  

*James Grehan, ‘Street Violence and Social Imagination in Late-Mamluk and Ottoman Damascus (ca. 1500-1800)’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35/2 (2003), 215-236. @GC

*Amina Elbendary, *Between Riots and Negotiations. Urban Protest in Late Medieval Egypt and Syria* (Berlin, 2012). @ac

*Amina Elbendary, ‘Popular Politics in the Medieval Middle East’, *History Compass*, volume 16, issue 10 (October 2018). @GC

Draft syllabus August 14, 2020
Amina Elbendary, *Crowds and Sultans. Urban Protest in Late Medieval Egypt and Syria* (Cairo, 2015).
@NYPL

NB: October 14 follows a Monday schedule at CUNY. No meeting on this day.

8) **Islamic law I: sexual and domestic violence** (October 21)


*Ayesha S. Chaudhry, *Domestic Violence and the Islamic Tradition* (Oxford, 2013), introduction, chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 1-94). @ac

Elyse Semerdjian, *“Off the Straight Path”. Illicit Sex, Law, and Community in Ottoman Aleppo* (Syracuse, 2008), chapter 5 ‘In Harm’s Way. Domestic Violence and Rape in the Shari’a Courts of Aleppo’, 138ff.

Azman Mohd Noor, ‘Rape: A Problem of Crime Classification in Islamic Law’, *Arab Law Quarterly* 24/4 (2010), 417-438. @GC

Hina Azam, ‘Rape as a Variant of Fornication (zīnā) in Islamic Law. An Examination of the Early Legal Reports’, *Journal of Law and Religion* 28/2 (2012), 441-466. @GC


Mohammad Mazher Idriss and Tahir Abbas, *Honour, Violence, Women and Islam* (London, 2010). @GC

Marie Faihinger et al (eds), *Feminism, Law and Religion* (Routledge, 2013), chapter 14 ‘Competing Approaches to Rape in Islamic Law’.

9) **Islamic law II: homicide** (October 28)


*Fariba Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment in Istanbul, 1700-1800*. Chapter ‘Violence and Homicide’. @GC

*Rudolph Peters, *Crime and Punishment in Islamic Law. Theory and Practice from the Sixteenth to the Twenty-first Century* (Cambridge, 2005), section on homicide and bodily harm (pp. 38-53). @ac

10) Islamic law III: corporal punishments (November 4)

*Christian Lange, Justice, Punishment and the Medieval Muslim Imagination (Cambridge, 2008), parts 1 (pp. 23-98) and 3 (177-243). @GC

*Vardit Rispler-Chaim, Disability in Islamic Law (Dordrecht, 2007), chapter ‘Disabilities Caused by Humans: Intentional and Unintentional Injuries’ (pp. 75-92). @GC

*Irene Schneider, ‘Imprisonment in Pre-Classical and Classical Islamic Law’, Islamic Law and Society 2/2 (1995), 157-173. @GC

*G. Geltner, Flogging Others. Corporal Punishment and Cultural Identity from Antiquity to the Present (Amsterdam, 2014), introduction and chapter 1 (pp. 9-28). @GC

Rudolph Peters, Crime and Punishment in Islamic Law. Theory and Practice from the Sixteenth to the Twenty-first Century (Cambridge, 2005), section on hadd offences (pp. 53-65). @ac

Walter Young, Stoning and Hand-Amputation. The Pre-Islamic Origins of the Hadd Penalties for Zinā and Sariqa, MA dissertation, McGill University, 2006. @GC

Kamari Maxine Clarke, Fictions of Justice. The International Criminal Court and the Challenge of Legal Pluralism in Sub-Saharan Africa (Cambridge, 2009), chapter 5 (‘“The Hand Will Go to Hell”: Islamic law and the Crafting of the Spiritual Self’), 182-205. @GC


11) Women as agents of violence (November 11)

In the following three books, get a general impression of the individual books by reading introductions and conclusions and read a chapter or two of your choice from each book:

*Laura Sjoberg, Gendering Global Conflict – Toward a Feminist Theory of War (New York, 2013). @GC

*Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, Women, Gender, and Terrorism (Athens, 2011). @GC

*Caron E. Gentry and Laura Sjoberg, Beyond Mothers, Monsters, Whores. Thinking about Women’s Violence in Global Politics (London, 2015). @GC


Laura Sjoberg, Women as Wartime Rapists. Beyond Sensation and Stereotyping (New York, 2017). [physical copy at NYPL]
Azadeh Moaveni, *Guest House for Young Widows. Among the Women of Isis* (New York, 2019). @NYPL


**12) Aestheticization of violence** (November 18)


*Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy. Myth, Gender, and Ceremony in the Classical Arabic Ode* (Bloomington, 2002), 144-179. @GC

NB: November 25 follows a Friday schedule at CUNY. No meeting on this day.

**13) Martyrdom and self-sacrifice** (December 2)

*David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam* (Cambridge, 2007), 1-44. @ac

*One or two book reviews of your choice of Cook’s book

*David B. Edwards, *Caravan of Martyrs. Sacrifice and Suicide Bombing in Afghanistan* (Berkeley, 2017). Read the preface and a chapter of your choice. @GC

Margaret Cormack, *Sacrificing the Self. Perspectives on Martyrdom and Religion* (Oxford, 2002). @GC


**14) Optional topics** (December 9)

- Non-violence
- Violence against the self (suicide)
- Public violence against non-Muslims
- Terrorism
- Violence against non-human animals

This syllabus is subject to changes.