

The Transmission of Early Islamic Law: A Digital Humanities Initiative
HIS 170: History of Islamic Civilization I: Origins to 1500, Fall 2014

I. Course Description:

Students in this course will combine the traditional tools of historical inquiry — close readings of primary sources and critical review of secondary literature — with computational tools such as crowdsourced data mining and database creation to explore, visualize and produce new insights into the political, social, and cultural history of the Islamic World from its origins in the 7th century to rise of the Ottoman empire. A key component of the course will be a digital humanities project in which students will work together to collect biographical data from the earliest extant canonical source of Islamic law in translation, and work on their own to visualize and analyze patterns they find in the data they collected. Students will place their findings in the context of the broader topics surveyed in the course, including: Islam in late Antiquity; the transmission of Islamic religious and legal authority; the development of political, and cultural institutions; the flourishing of medieval Islamic education, science, and literature; the tension among state, ethnic, sectarian, and global Muslim identities; and the emergence of a distinctly Muslim approach to historiography.

II. Overview:

The earliest canonical source of Islamic law is the *Muwatta'* (*The Well-Trodden Path*), a collection of more than 1700 reports (hadiths) attributed to Muhammad and his companions. The compiler, Malik ibn Anas (d. 795), narrated each of these reports by a chain of oral transmission to their sources, typically three or four degrees long between him and Muhammad or Muhammad's companions.

Biographical dictionaries emerged in the classical period of Islamic civilization that detailed each of the transmitters in many canonical collections of hadiths, including in the *Muwatta'*. Typically, biographical entries in these works include the following information: gender, death dates, locations of residence, tribal information, and statements attesting to their trustworthiness. 'Abd al-Hayy al-Laknawi's biographical dictionary of the *Muwatta'* contains brief biographies of the approximately 600 transmitters of the *Muwatta'*. This allowed early jurists to develop a method of authenticating these reports by collecting the known biographies of the transmitters contained in the chains of transmission to determine whether each transmission was historically plausible (based on death dates and histories of residence) and whether the transmitters had reputations for being "trustworthy."

The transmitters of the *Muwatta'* are thus ripe for an on-going collaborative digital humanities project, and one that will be inaugurated in "HIS 170: History of Islamic Civilization I: Origins to 1500." While there has been a growth of digital Islamic humanities projects (<http://islamichumanities.org/>) including one that I collaborated on in 2009 — "The Yemen Manuscript Digitization Initiative" grant proposal submitted by Princeton University to the NEH — there is yet to be an on-going project collecting and analyzing data from the transmitters of early Islamic law. This is partly because such a project would require a large-group of scholars with knowledge of classical Arabic. A recent English translation of the *Muwatta'* with 'Abd al-Hayy al-Laknawi's biographical dictionary appended, however, makes a digital humanities project possible at the undergraduate level.

Undergraduates will work together to collect data from the biographical dictionary in translation as well as the *Muwatta'* itself, create a master database of transmitters' biographic information, and then work on their own to visualize and analyze patterns in the data. Each term the course is offered, undergraduates will add to our growing knowledge of the early history of these transmitters. Using MatLab,¹ analyses and visualizations will be collected together and exported to HTML so that it can be made available for other scholars on-line.

Students will develop skills in crowdsourced data collection, database creation, data mining, analysis and visualization to convey historical knowledge in general and a multifaceted understanding of the development of Islamic thought and society in particular, a key learning objective of the course.

Over the coming years, this project will result in several presentations of their work at upcoming academic conferences such as the "Textual Corpora and the Digital Islamic Humanities" Conference at Brown October 17-18, 201, and future gatherings of the American Academy of Religion or the American Historical Association. Within a reasonable time frame, and with the help of summer research grant, this project will also contribute to in the publication in a refereed-journal or collected volume, and the creation of an interactive on-line database used by Islamicists and historians outside of W&L.

¹ I am exploring using other visualization software that may be easier for students to master, but MatLab is currently the software that appears to best suit the needs of my proposed project.

II. Course outline for HIS 170: History of Islamic Civilization I: Origins to 1500

Weeks 1-6:

As students are undertaking a survey of early Islamic history, students will also catalog the 600+ transmitters of the *Muwatta'* in alphabetical order in a master-database through a shared google spreadsheet, along with their death dates, alternate death dates, gender, tribal information, any information on their places of residence or study, sectarian identity, conversion, and the number of quotations certifying their trustworthiness, keywords used to describe their trustworthiness. In addition to their weekly reading and writing assignments surveying Islamic civilization — which will both enrich and be enriched by this digital humanities project by helping students place the transmitters in their broader historical context — students will be tasked with collecting and entering data for ten transmitters per week. If ten students enroll for the course, we will have the master-database completed within six weeks.

Students will be evaluated on their accuracy, attention to detail, and participation. If students produce more than 10 accurate and detailed entries per week, they stand to gain extra credit. I will randomly sample students' entries both for "quality control" and for purposes of evaluation. Participation in the creation of the database is worth %10 of their overall grade.

At midterms, I will export that data to excel, and import it to MatLab.

Weeks 6-12:

After midterms, students will receive an orientation to MatLab and 3D graphing in the IQ center, and will then work on their own to use MatLab to visualize significant patterns in the data, graphing frequency of death dates in certain periods, gender, tribal information, sectarian identity, residence, trustworthiness, or other correlations they observe among these factors. Each student will then use MatLab to export their graphs and its analyses in HTML, which will be added to a growing and and interactive website.

At week 8 and week 10, students will peer review "drafts" of their visualizations and float their analyses during and outside of class. Students will evaluate one another's visualizations on originality, clarity, and accuracy, and overall effectiveness, and provide suggestions for analysis.

End of term:

At the end of the term, students will present their work in the IQ center, joined by the public and a guest scholar (either Behnam Sadeghi [Stanford], Luke Yarborough [St. Louis] or Elias Muhanna [Brown]) who is actively pursuing studies of chains of transmission or the Islamic digital humanities in their current research.

The 3D projector in the IQ center will be used for those students who choose to present 3D graphs and charts to help make intelligible complex relationships between frequency, time and geographic space. I will collaborate with the IQ coordinator, David Pfaff, to facilitate these 3D presentations. Students will be evaluated on their visualization's and analyses' originality, clarity, accuracy, and overall effectiveness. The visualization, analysis and presentation will be worth %25 of their grade.

III. Long term goals:

Islamic Civilizations: Origins-1500 Fall 2014 will attempt the first collection of the data and its analysis. Later iterations of the course and other related courses (such as "HIS 289: Profit and Prophecy in Islam" and a Spring Term course titled "Origins of Islam: A Digital Humanities Approach") will corroborate earlier evidence and build on it. These later courses will refine the master-database and build on it to calculate gaps in death dates between the chains of transmission, comparing individuals books against one another, and individual books against the whole, or chains with individual transmitters against others or the whole. For the Spring Term course, I will collaborate with students or faculty who have mastered a higher c++ language to set-up interactive visualizations on-line that will allow users to explore original patterns in the data for themselves.

Some future areas for data collections and analysis will lie in comparing the chains of transmission within subcategories of the *Muwatta'* (e.g. gaps in death dates in the "Chapter on Divorce" versus the "Chapter on Marriage" or the work as a whole). Future projects will also make use of mapplication to map transmission across geographical space or networks of transmitters.

Other areas of research in future iterations of the course will include:

- length of chains
- frequency of repeated chains
- repeated transmitters
- depth of chains (prophetic reports vs. companion reports)
- gaps in death dates

- known occupations

IV. Sample page from a 'Abd al-Hayy al-Laknawi's biographical dictionary

الرَّجَالُ
THE NARRATORS
Shaykh 'Abd al-Hayy al-Laknawī

A
"A man" [ḥadīth 821]. There is in the *Muwattaʿ* of Yahyā and its commentaries "Mālik from Muḥammad ibn 'Abdullāh ibn Abī Maryam al-Khuzāʿī." A Ḥātim said, "A right-acting Madīnan shaykh," and Ibn Ḥibbān mention him in *ath-Thiqāt* as the one who asked Saʿīd ibn al-Musayyab, and so that the unknown man is made known.

"A narrator who is trustworthy to me" [ḥadīth 716]. Az-Zuhri said, "Some say that it was Makhramah ibn Bukayr al-Madīnī, because al-Walīd ibn Muslim narrated it from 'Abdullāh ibn Luhayʿah."

transmitter's name → Aban ibn 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, Abū 'Abdullāh the Madīnan, [son of] the Amīr al-Mu'minīn the third of the Khulafā' who took the right way, was a Follower who had many narrations

death date → died in 105 AH.

gender → male

birthplace → Madīna

remark on trustworthiness → trustworthy narrator. He

sectarian information → He was one of the noble men in every respect.

migration to new residence → He had become a shī'ah and al-Rashīd imprisoned him for a time and then later released him, and so he resided in Baghdād. There is disagreement about the

V. Sample of first six columns of the corresponding database entry

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Transmitter's Name	Gender	death date	birthplace	migration to new residence	sectarian information
2	Aban ibn 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, Abū 'Abdullāh	Male	105 AH	Madina	Baghdad	Shi'a

VI. Reference Texts and Further Reading

Azami, Muhammad. *Studies in Early Ḥadīth Literature*. Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2000.

Brown, Jonathan A.C. *Hadith*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2009.

Goldziher, Ignac. *Muslim Studies vol. II*. edited by S. M. Stern. London, Allen and Unwin: 1971.

Hallaq, Wael: "The Authenticity of Prophetic Ḥadīth: a Pseudo-problem." *Studia Islamica* 89 (1999): 75-90.

Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī. *An Introduction to the Science of the Ḥadīth*. Trans. Eerik Dickinson. Reading: Garnet, 2006.

Juynboll, G.H.A. *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of Early Ḥadīth*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Lucas, Scott. *Constructive Critics: Ḥadīth Literature and the Articulation of Sunnī Islam*. Leiden: Brill, 2004

Motzki, Harold, ed. *Ḥadīth: Origins and Developments*. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

_____. 'Dating Muslim Traditions: a Survey,' *Arabica*, 52, no. 2, 2005, 204–253.

Schacht, Joseph. *Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1967.

_____. '(Re)Appraisal of some Hadith Technical Terms,' *Islamic Law and Society*, 8, no. 3, 2001, pp. 303–349.

Islamic Civilization I: Origins to 1500

a digital humanities approach



HIS 170, Fall 2014

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Students in this course will combine the traditional tools of historical inquiry — close readings of primary sources and critical review of secondary literature — with computational tools such as crowdsourced data mining and database creation to explore, visualize and produce new insights into the political, social, and cultural history of the Islamic World from its origins in the 7th century to rise of the Ottoman empire. A key component of the course will be a digital humanities project in which students will work together to collect biographical data from the earliest extant canonical source of Islamic law in translation, and work on their own to visualize and analyze patterns they find in the data they collected. Students will analyze their findings in the context of the broader topics surveyed in the course, including: Islam in late Antiquity; the transmission of Islamic religious and legal authority; the development of political, and cultural institutions; the flourishing of medieval Islamic education, science, and literature; the tension among state, ethnic, sectarian, and global Muslim identities; and the emergence of a distinctly Muslim approach to historiography.

Course Objectives and Outcomes:

1. Develop historical literacy, which includes:

a. Identifying significant information in a historical document, visual image, or other primary source, and constructing a narrative of an event in Islamic history from a group of primary sources.

b. Identifying the key points in a scholarly argument over Islamic political thought and assessing its strengths and weaknesses, and analyzing key points of disagreement between two or more scholarly interpretations of a major development in Islamic history.

c. Integrating the analysis of primary and secondary sources, applying information that the student has discovered in primary sources to the evaluation of a scholarly debate.

2. Develop critical writing skills to convey historical knowledge in general and a multifaceted understanding of Islamic thought and society in particular.

3. Develop oral communication skills to convey historical knowledge in general and a multifaceted understanding of Islamic thought and society in particular.

4. Develop skills in crowdsourced data collection, data mining, analysis and visualization to convey historical knowledge in general and to create original insights into the development of Islamic thought and society in particular.

Books to be purchased:

Fred Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*

Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 1

Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 2

Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*

Anas Ibn Malik, *The Muwatta'*

Grading Components:

Participation and Weekly On-line Forum Posts: 10%
Early Muslim Transmitters (EMT) Data Collection: 10%
Visualization, Analysis, and Public Presentation of EMT Data: 25%
Map and Timeline Quiz: 5%
One 5-7 page peer-reviewed mid-semester paper: 25%
Take home final exam: 25%

(Details at the end of the syllabus).

Course Schedule: (NB: Schedule and Readings are subject to change)

Unit One: The Emergence of Islam

Week One: The Near East on the Eve of Islam

M: Introduction to the course and discussion of digital humanities project.

W: Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, ch 1.

Week Two: Muhammad and the Expansion of the Community of Believers

M: Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, ch 2 and *History of al-Tabari*, selections.

T: On-line Forum post due.

W: Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, ch. 3 and *History of al-Tabari*, selections.

F: 10 *Muwatta'* biographical data entries due

Week Three: The Struggle for Leadership and the Emergence of Islam

M: Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, ch. 4 and *History of al-Tabari*, selections.

W: **Map and Timeline Quiz.** Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, ch. 5

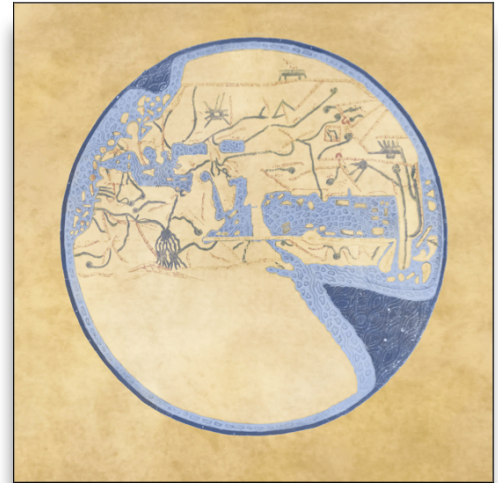
F: 10 *Muwatta'* biographical data entries due

Week Four: The Classical Civilization of the High Caliphate

M: Hodgson, *Venture of Islam I*, "The Islamic Opposition, 692-750" and Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddima*, selections.

W: Hodgson, *Venture of Islam I*, "The Shar'i Islamic Vision, c. 750-945," and Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddima*, selections.

F: 10 *Muwatta'* biographical data entries due



Week Five: The Flowering of Muslim Piety, Speculation and Literature

M: Hodgson, *Venture of Islam I*, "Muslim Personal Piety" and Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddima*, selections.

W: Hodgson, *Venture of Islam I*, "Speculation" and "Adab."

F: 10 *Muwatta'* biographical data entries due

Submit rough draft of mid-term paper in dropbox.

Week Six: Understanding our data

M: Present and workshop paper theses in-class

T: Three Essay Reviews Due by e-mail in sakai dropbox by 5pm.

W: Meet at the IQ Center for Matlab and 3D visualization orientation.

F: Any remaining *Muwatta'* biographical data entries due

Revised paper due in sakai dropbox by 5pm Friday

Unit Two: The Post-Classical Period



Week Seven: Power and Money

M: Hodgson, *Venture of Islam II*, "The Formation of the International Political Order, 945-1118"

W: Hodgson, *Venture of Islam II*, "The Social Order: Mercantile Interests, Military Power, Liberty"

Week Eight: Power and Money II

M: Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddima*, ch. 3, "On dynasties and royal authority..."

W: Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddima*, ch. 5 "On the various aspects of making a living..."

F: First draft of visualizations due for peer review.

Week Nine: Sufism, Sunnism

M: Hodgson, *Venture of Islam II*, "Sufi Tariqahs"

W: Hodgson, *Venture of Islam II*, "The Victory of the New Sunni Internationalism, 1118-1258"

Week Ten: Women in the Islamic World

M: Asma Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission of Knowledge*, selections

W: Yossef Rappoport, "Women and Gender in Mamluk Society"

F: Second draft of visualizations due for peer review.

Week Eleven: Crisis and Renewal: The Age of Mongol Prestige

M: Hodgson, *Venture of Islam II*, "After the Mongol Irruption: Politics and Society, 1259-1405 and Conservation and Courtliness in the Intellectual Traditions, c. 1258-1503."

W: Hodgson, *Venture of Islam II*, "The Visual Arts in an Islamic Setting, c. 1258-1503" and "The Expansion of Islam, c. 1258-1503."

Week Twelve:

M: In-class Presentations of Visualizations at IQ center

W: In-class Presentations of Visualizations at IQ center

take home exam on the post-classical period
due on the third day of exam week.

Requirements and Grading

1. Participation and Weekly On-line Reflections (10%) — no one will obtain an “A” grade without participation in discussion. More than three absences from class meetings for any reason will result in forfeiting the attendance and participation. If you have a special circumstance that prevents you from attending regularly, please make a time to speak with me. Students will also be expected to contribute to on-line weekly reflections throughout the semester. A written reflection should be about two paragraphs articulating a problem, idea, insight you found while you were completing the week’s readings. These reflections may become the nugget or thesis for your longer mid-semester and final papers, so give your reflections some thought.
2. One 5-7 page peer-reviewed mid-semester paper (25%). Respond to a paper topic or develop one of your on-line reflections into a 5-7 page paper, citing works assigned in the course up to that point. This paper will be peer reviewed by three of your classmates, revised and then handed-in as a final draft.
3. One Map and Timeline Quiz (5%). You will be expected to identify one contemporary and one medieval map of the Muslim world, as well as put in chronological order the major Muslim dynasties of the classical and post-classical period.
4. One take home final exam (25%). Use 1500 words to respond an open-book essay question due during exam week.
5. Early Muslim Transmitters Data Collection (10%). For the first six weeks of class, you must collect and enter data from at least 10 biographies of transmitters of the *Muwatta’*. You will be evaluated on your accuracy, attention to detail, and participation. If you produce more than 10 accurate and detailed entries per week, you stand to gain extra credit.
6. Visualization, Analysis, and Public Presentation of EMT Data (25%). A practiced but extemporaneous 5 minute presentation (followed by 5 minutes of Q&A) at the IQ center (using 3D projector when relevant) on your visualization, analysis of the Early Muslim Transmitter data we collected as a group. Visualizations and their analyses will be graded for accuracy, originality, clarity, and overall effectiveness.

The fine print: Assignments must be submitted by their due dates. A one-point grade penalty will be deducted for unexcused delays (e.g. an ‘A’ paper handed-in late will be graded as an ‘A-’, a ‘B+’ paper as a ‘B’ and so on). A passing grade in each of the grading components is required to pass the course (i.e. a student who fails to complete one of the components will not pass the course, even if they received an “A” in every other component). Final grades that are “on the fence” will not be rounded up.