

**HIS 381:  
The Forgotten Queens of Islam**

Fall 2019  
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:00 AM – 12:15 PM  
Main Hall 402

## Syllabus

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### Course Description:

For the past 1,400 years, women have had a profound impact on institutions and ideologies in the Islamic world. They have mastered branches of knowledge, produced works of culture, amassed wealth, and even ruled as queens. In this course, students will read about prominent women's lives in historical texts from the Islamic world, focusing on the period from 600–1700 CE. Students will learn to read these historical texts "against the grain" through the lens of feminist history, which uses female perspectives to *reframe and reconfigure* our understanding of the past. By the end of the course, students will be equipped to analyze the various forms of power that have historically been available (and unavailable) to women the Islamic Middle East, and to assess the many ways women have navigated unequal power structures in order to participate in their polities. The course will also equip students to articulate an informed, reasoned openness to differences related to issues such as: gender roles, family structures (including concubinage and polygyny), clothing/veiling, sex segregation (including the harem institution), sexuality, and legal status (particularly, the many complex meanings of slavery and freedom).

This course challenges students to move beyond simple, binary thinking when considering women from the Islamic Middle East. Such women have never been *either* passive, oppressed victims on the one hand, *or* fully liberated, agentive individuals on the other. Instead, students will analyze the way women from the Islamic Middle East have *participated* in their societies, whether by resisting, subverting, or embracing patriarchal structures. This refusal to uncritically accept false dichotomies is an important step toward building a just and equitable society. Additionally, students in this course will consider many different voices from many different perspectives, both in readings and in class discussions. Students will not be merely passive receivers of the professor's knowledge, but will work together to build a supportive and collaborative community of learning. Such active learning and collaboration is another crucial step toward graduating students committed to a just and equitable world.

## Required Materials:

- Ahmed, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.
- Mernissi, Fatima. *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*. Translated by Mary Jo Lakeland. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- Caswell, Fuad Matthew. *The Slave Girls of Baghdad the Qiyān in the Early Abbasid Era*. London: Tauris, 2011.
- Peirce, Leslie. *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Other readings will be provided on D2L (see reading list below).

## Student Learning Outcomes:

### Course SLOS:

- **Identify** prominent historical women leaders, scholars, and authors from the Islamic Middle East and situate them in their historical contexts.  
Assignments that achieve this SLO: all assignments.
- **Understand** and **apply** the concept of *feminist history* to primary sources from the Arabic-Islamic historical tradition. Read texts "against the grain" to reveal gendered assumptions and unspoken power dynamics.  
Assignments that achieve this SLO: source analysis, research paper, enactment, synthesis essay.
- **Analyze** the various forms of power that have historically been available—and unavailable—to women in the Islamic Middle East.  
Assignments that achieve this SLO: research paper, enactment, synthesis essay.
- **Analyze** the ways women have both directly and indirectly shaped political institutions and ideologies in the Islamic Middle East.  
Assignments that achieve this SLO: research paper, enactment, synthesis essay.
- **Conduct** historical research and **construct** original historical arguments based on source evidence.  
Assignments that achieve this SLO: research paper, enactment.
- **Communicate** ideas clearly and effectively in oral and written formats.  
Assignments that achieve this SLO: all assignments.

### History Department SLOS:

This upper-level History elective course is ideally suited to help students demonstrate four learning outcomes essential for the successful student of history. To meet department of history student learning outcomes, this course develops students' abilities to do the following:

- **Construct** generalizations and interpretations that demonstrate knowledge of historical eras, change over time, and key historical concepts  
Assignments that achieve this SLO: all
- **Communicate** knowledge of history in reasoned arguments supported by historical evidence and an appreciation of multiple causes, effects, and perspectives, in both oral and written presentations.  
Assignments that achieve this SLO: all

- Locate, identify & acknowledge **multiple points of view** in primary and secondary sources.  
Assignments that achieve this SLO: source analysis, research paper, synthesis essay
- **Connect** their knowledge of historical events and topics to a broader context (historical, political, global, historiographical, or with contemporary life and issues).  
Assignments that achieve this SLO: embodiment, synthesis essay

### *Women's & Gender Studies Department SLOS:*

This course employs **feminist pedagogical techniques**. This means that students will consider many different voices from many different perspectives, both in readings and in class discussions. Students will not be merely passive receivers of the professor's knowledge, but will work together to build a supportive and collaborative community of learning.

This course is taught as part of the Women's and Gender Studies curriculum, and it counts toward both the major and minor in Women's Studies. As such, the course contributes to the following learning outcomes:

- Developing a student's ability to **identify women's and feminist activities and accomplishments** – especially those that have conventionally been neglected – across a variety of cultures and historical contexts  
Assignments that achieve this SLO: all
- Developing a student's understanding of **intersectionality** and ability to analyze the complex relationship between gender, sexuality, ethnicity, social class, and legal status (slavery/freedom).  
Assignments that achieve this SLO: research paper, embodiment, synthesis essay
- Developing **information literacy skills** (locating, evaluating, and using relevant and appropriate information) related to women's and gender studies.  
Assignments that achieve this SLO: source analysis, research paper, synthesis essay

### *General Education SLOS:*

This course fulfills the Diverse Communities (J) requirement. It meets the following General Education Goals:

- **Goal #1: Communicate Effectively**
  - a) Express oneself effectively in common college-level written forms  
Assignments that achieve this SLO: source analysis, research paper, synthesis essay
  - c) Express oneself effectively in presentations  
Assignments that achieve this SLO: embodiment
  - d) Demonstrate comprehension of and ability to explain information and ideas accessed through reading  
Assignments that achieve this SLO: all
- **Goal #2: Think Critically and Analytically**
  - a) Use relevant evidence gathered through accepted scholarly methods, and properly acknowledge sources of information, to support an idea  
Assignments that achieve this SLO: all

b) Construct and/or analyze arguments in terms of their premises, assumptions, contexts, conclusions, and anticipated counter-arguments

Assignments that achieve this SLO: research paper, synthesis essay

c) Reach sound conclusions based on a logical analysis of evidence

Assignments that achieve this SLO: all

d) Develop creative or innovative approaches to assignments or projects

Assignments that achieve this SLO: embodiment

- → **Goal #5: Respond Thoughtfully to Diversity** (primary goal)

a) Discuss the historical practices leading to the marginalization of diverse groups

Assignments that achieve this SLO: all

b) Identify and analyze structural inequalities using feminist history

Assignments that achieve this SLO: source analysis, synthesis essay

- **Goal #6: Understand varied historical, cultural, and philosophical traditions**

b) Demonstrate an understanding of varied historical, cultural, and/or philosophical traditions

Assignments that achieve this SLO: all

### **Arabic Culture Cluster:**

HIS /WOS 381 counts as an Arabic Culture Cluster. This course introduces students to some of the most **prominent women** from the history of the Islamic Middle East. It also introduces them to some of the most **foundational texts and influential (male) authors** from the Arabic-Islamic literary tradition. Finally, it challenges them to recognize the **diversity** of Arab, Muslim, and Middle Eastern women's experiences.

### **Meeting & Assessing Student Learning Outcomes:**

#### **10% Attendance**

Students get one *unexcused* absence before your attendance grade begins to drop (by 1/3 letter grade per unexcused absence). To get an *excused* absence, please contact me *before* class with a valid excuse, such as a university-sanctioned event, illness, injury, or family emergency.

#### **15% Participation**

Short reading response journals, thoughtful participation in class discussions, and discussion leading.

#### **20% Primary Source Analysis**

First, students will read models of feminist historical scholarship and practice analyzing primary sources in class. Then, students will demonstrate their mastery of the lens of feminist history by analyzing a primary source from Islamic history (students will choose **one**):

- Bukhari (d. 870), *Sahih al-Bukhari*, sayings of the Prophet Muhammad about women
- Ibn Hisham (d. 833), *The Life of Muhammad*, on Muhammad's wife Khadija
- Tabari (d. 923), *History of Prophets and Kings*, on the queen-mother al-Khayzuran
- Jahiz (d. 868), "Chanteuses," on a class of enslaved female entertainers

#### **15% "Forgotten Queen" Research Paper**

Throughout the quarter, students will do their own independent research on one prominent woman from Islamic history. Professor Urban will provide a list of women to choose from; each student will select a different woman from this list.

Students will write a **5-page paper** that places this woman in historical context and analyzes the way(s) she exercised power. This paper should present a historical *argument* and back up that argument using historical evidence. Students will locate at least five secondary sources and at least two primary sources (in English translation) to support their argument.

### 15% "Forgotten Queen" Embodiment

On the same day they turn in their research paper, students will creatively present their research to the rest of the class by "embodying" the woman they wrote about. The student will use a combination of primary source research and empathetic imagination to attempt to understand this woman's worldview and experiences. The student will introduce "herself," tell a salient story or two about how and why she exercised power in her society, and field questions from the audience about her perspective.

The due date for both paper and enactment depend on the woman chosen as the topic of study.

### 25% Final Synthesis Essay

Students will draw upon course readings, in-class discussions, and their own independent research to write an **8-page encyclopedia article** titled "**Women and the Exercise of Power in Pre-Modern Islamic History.**" They will consider such issue as: What forms of power were women able to exercise in different pre-modern Islamic historical contexts? How did they access this power? What were the limits to this power? How did women directly and indirectly influence Islamic political ideologies and institutions? What should readers ultimately learn or take away from studying this topic?

Students will have to make decisions about how to organize their article, which historical contexts or overarching themes to focus on, which primary and secondary sources to invoke as evidence, and what they see as the ultimate relevance or significance of the topic. The point is to demonstrate that students have mastered the historical content and methodologies of the course.

### Attendance Policy:

I take attendance at the beginning of class every day. Students get one "free" unexcused absence that does not count against their attendance grade. After that, each unexcused absence causes the attendance grade to drop by 1/3 letter grade (e.g. from an A to an A-, or from a B- to a C+). Excused absences do not count against your attendance grade. To receive an excused absence, the student must contact Dr. Urban before class begins, with a valid excuse such as documented illness, family emergency, or university-sanctioned event.

### Evaluation & Grading:

A letter grade will be assigned based on performance in the course according to the following scale:

Grade	Quality Points	Percentage Equivalents	Interpretation
A	4.00	93-100	Excellent
A-	3.67	90-92	
B+	3.33	87-89	Superior
B	3.00	83-86	
B-	2.67	80-82	
C+	2.33	77-79	Average

C	2.00	73-76	
C-	1.67	70-72	
D+	1.33	67-69	Below Average
D	1.00	63-66	
D-	0.67	60-62	
F	0	< 60%	Failure

**Exam Make-Up Policy:**

There are no exams in this class. If students miss the due date for an assignment, they may turn in the assignment up to **one week late**, with a 1/3-letter-grade penalty applied for each day of lateness. After one week past the due date, the assignment will receive a grade of 0.

**Tentative Course Outline:**

Week #	Topic	Reading Due	Assignment Due
1	Introduction to Islamic History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leila Ahmed, <i>Women and Gender in Islam</i>, Introduction</li> <li>Fatima Mernissi, <i>The Forgotten Queens of Islam</i>, Introduction–Ch. 1</li> </ul>	n/a
2	Introduction to Feminist History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Joan Wallach Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis" (1986)</li> <li>Jill Matthews, "Feminist History" (1986)</li> <li>Judith Bennett, "Feminism and History" (1989)</li> <li>Gisela Bock, "Women's History and Gender History" (1989).</li> </ul>	n/a (informal reading responses for participation)
3	Normative Texts on Female Power: Scripture, Law, & Political Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nikki Keddie, "Problems in the Study of Middle Eastern Women" (1979)</li> <li>Haifaa Khalafallah, "Muslim Women: Public Authority, Scriptures, and 'Islamic Law'" (2005)</li> <li>Mernissi, Ch. 2</li> <li><b>Primary Source:</b> Excerpts from the Quran, Bukhari's <i>Sahih</i> (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad), and Nizam al-Mulk's <i>Book of Government</i></li> </ul>	n/a (informal reading responses)
4	Women in the Late Antique Near East (300–700 CE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Eleanor Doumato, "Hearing Other Voices: Christian Women and the Coming of Islam" (1991)</li> <li>Ahmed, Ch. 1–2</li> <li><b>Primary Source:</b> Excerptpts from the New Testament; Letter of Simeon Beth Arsham (500s CE) on the Martyrs of Najran</li> </ul>	n/a (informal reading responses)
5	Women in the Earliest Islamic Community (600–650 CE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Farhana Qazi, "The Mujahidat: Tracing the Early Female Warriors of Islam" (2012)</li> <li>Ahmed, Ch. 3</li> <li>Mernissi, Ch. 3</li> <li><b>Primary Source:</b> Excerpts from Ibn Hisham's (800s CE) <i>Life of Muhammad</i> on Muhammad's wife, Khadija</li> </ul>	<b>Primary Source Analysis Due</b>
6	Women in the	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Khalil Athamina, "How did Islam Contribute to</li> </ul>	n/a

	Islamic Conquests and Umayyad Period (650–750 CE)	<p>Change the Legal Status of Women?" (2007)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maya Yazigi, "Some Accounts of Women Delegates to Caliph Muawiya: Political Significance" (2005)</li> <li>• Ahmed, Ch. 4</li> </ul>	(informal reading responses)
7	Women in the Classical Abbasid Caliphate 1 (750–1000 CE): Queens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• El-Cheikh, "Gender and Politics in the Harem of al-Muqtadir" (2004)</li> <li>• Mernissi, Ch. 4</li> <li>• Ahmed, Ch. 5</li> <li>• <b>Primary Source:</b> Excerpts from al-Tabari's (900s CE) <i>History of Prophets and Kings</i> on first Abbasid concubine-queen-mother, al-Khayzuran</li> </ul>	n/a (informal reading responses)
8	Women in the Classical Abbasid Caliphate 2: Courtesans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caswell, <i>The Slave Girls of Baghdad</i>, Ch. 1–4, and Ch. 8–12</li> <li>• Ahmed, Ch. 6</li> <li>• <b>Primary Source:</b> al-Jahiz's (800s CE) "Chanteuses"</li> </ul>	<b>Papers/ Enactments:</b> Islamic Origins  Ruhm Khadija Aisha Fatima Nussayba
9	Women in the Classical Abbasid Caliphate 3: Mystics and Scholars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rkia Cornell, "Rabi'ah Al-'Adawiyyah (circa 720-801)" (2005)</li> <li>• Asma Sayeed, <i>Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam</i>, Chapter 3 (2013)</li> <li>• Omaima Abou-Bakr, "Articulating Gender: Muslim Women Intellectuals in the Pre-Modern Period" (2010)</li> <li>• <b>Primary Source:</b> Attar's (1200s) <i>Biographies of the Saints</i> on Rabia al-Adawiyya</li> </ul>	<b>Papers/ Enactments:</b> Abbasid Politicians  Khayzuran Zubayda Shaghab Thumal Umm Musa
10	Women in Islamic Spain (900-1100 CE): Interfaith Politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manuela Marín, "Una Vida de Mujer: Subh" (translated by Prof. Urban) (1997)</li> <li>• Nada Mourtada-Sabbah and Adrian Gully, "'I Am, By God, Fit for High Positions': On the Political Role of Women in al-Andalus" (2003)</li> <li>• Asma Afsaruddin, "Literature, Scholarship, and Piety: Negotiating Gender and Authority in the Medieval Muslim World" (2010)</li> <li>• Mernissi, Ch. 5–6</li> </ul>	<b>Papers/ Enactments:</b> Abbasid Poets  Inan Fadl Arib Rabia Ulayya bint al-Mahdi
11	Women in Shii Politics (900-1100 CE): The Legacy of Fatima	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Farhad Daftary, "Sayyida Hurra: The Isma'ili Sulayhid Queen of Yemen" (1998)</li> <li>• Simonetta Calderini, "Sayyida Raşad: A Royal Woman as 'Gateway to Power' During the Fatimid Era" (2007)</li> <li>• Mernissi, Ch. 7–8</li> <li>• <b>Primary Source:</b> Petition to Sitt al-Mulk from the Cairo Geniza</li> </ul>	<b>Papers/ Enactments:</b> Islamic Spain  Subh Al-Wallada Aisha al-Hurra
12	Women in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leslie Peirce, <i>The Imperial Harem</i>, Introduction and</li> </ul>	<b>Papers/ Enactments:</b>

	Turkic Polities (1100-1300 CE): The Legacy of the Steppes	<p>Ch. 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amalia Levanoni, "Shajar al-Durr: A Case of a Female Sultan in Late Medieval Islam" (2010)</li> <li>• Eric Hanne, "Women, Power, and the Eleventh and Twelfth century Abbasid court" (2005)</li> <li>• Mernissi, Ch. 9</li> </ul>	<p>Fatimid/Ismaili Dynasties:</p> <p>Sayyida Hurra Sitt al-Mulk Rasad</p>
13	Women in the Ottoman Empire 1 (1300–1600): Elaboration of the Harem System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peirce, Ch. 2–5</li> </ul> <p>(Note: this book is difficult and dense; give each chapter its due attention)</p>	<p><b>Papers/ Enactments:</b></p> <p>Turkic Polities</p> <p>Turkan Khatun Shajarat al-Durr Razia Sultana</p>
14	Women in the Ottoman Empire 2 (1600–1700s): The Age of the Favorite and the Queen Mother	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peirce, Ch. 6–9</li> </ul> <p>(Note: this book is difficult and dense; give each chapter its due attention)</p>	<p><b>Papers/ Enactments:</b></p> <p>Ottomans:</p> <p>Hurrem Kösem Nurbanu</p>
15	Connections to Current Debates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mernissi, Conclusion</li> <li>• Ahmed, Ch. 7–9 &amp; Conclusion</li> <li>• Margot Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic Feminisms" (2005)</li> <li>• <b>Primary Source:</b> Huda al-Shaarawi, <i>Harem Years</i>, excerpts</li> </ul>	<p>n/a (work on final paper)</p>
Finals	Course Recap	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• n/a</li> </ul>	<p><b>Final Synthesis Essay Due</b></p>

### Statements Common to All WCU Undergraduate Syllabi:

#### ACADEMIC & PERSONAL INTEGRITY

It is the responsibility of each student to adhere to the university's standards for academic integrity. Violations of academic integrity include any act that violates the rights of another student in academic work, that involves misrepresentation of your own work, or that disrupts the instruction of the course. Other violations include (but are not limited to): cheating on assignments or examinations; plagiarizing, which means copying any part of another's work and/or using ideas of another and presenting them as one's own without giving proper credit to the source; selling, purchasing, or exchanging of term papers; falsifying of information; and using your own work from one class to fulfill the assignment for another class without significant modification. Proof of academic misconduct can result in the automatic failure and removal from this course. For questions regarding Academic Integrity, the No-Grade Policy, Sexual Harassment, or the Student Code of Conduct, students are encouraged to refer to the Department



Undergraduate Handbook, the Undergraduate Catalog, the *Ram's Eye View*, and the University website at [www.wcupa.edu](http://www.wcupa.edu).

### **STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

If you have a disability that requires accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), please present your letter of accommodations and meet with me as soon as possible so that I can support your success in an informed manner. Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively. If you would like to know more about West Chester University's Services for Students with Disabilities (OSSD), please visit them at 223 Lawrence Center. The OSSD hours of Operation are Monday – Friday, 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. Their phone number is 610-436-2564, their fax number is 610-436-2600, their email address is [ossd@wcupa.edu](mailto:ossd@wcupa.edu), and their website is at [www.wcupa.edu/ussss/ossd](http://www.wcupa.edu/ussss/ossd).

### **EXCUSED ABSENCES POLICY**

Students are advised to carefully read and comply with the excused absences policy, including absences for university-sanctioned events, contained in the WCU Undergraduate Catalog. In particular, please note that the “responsibility for meeting academic requirements rests with the student,” that this policy does not excuse students from completing required academic work, and that professors can require a “fair alternative” to attendance on those days that students must be absent from class in order to participate in a University-Sanctioned Event.

### **REPORTING INCIDENTS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

West Chester University and its faculty are committed to assuring a safe and productive educational environment for all students. In order to meet this commitment and to comply with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and guidance from the Office for Civil Rights, the University requires faculty members to report incidents of sexual violence shared by students to the University's Title IX Coordinator, Ms. Lynn Klingensmith. The only exceptions to the faculty member's reporting obligation are when incidents of sexual violence are communicated by a student during a classroom discussion, in a writing assignment for a class, or as part of a University-approved research project. Faculty members are obligated to report sexual violence or any other abuse of a student who was, or is, a child (a person under 18 years of age) when the abuse allegedly occurred to the person designated in the University protection of minors policy. Information regarding the reporting of sexual violence and the resources that are available to victims of sexual violence is set forth at the webpage for the Office of Social Equity at <http://www.wcupa.edu/admin/social.equity/>.

### **EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS**

All students are encouraged to sign up for the University's free WCU ALERT service, which delivers official WCU emergency text messages directly to your cell phone. For more information, visit [www.wcupa.edu/wcualert](http://www.wcupa.edu/wcualert). To report an emergency, call the Department of Public Safety at 610-436-3311.

### **ELECTRONIC MAIL POLICY**

It is expected that faculty, staff, and students activate and maintain regular access to University provided e-mail accounts. Official university communications, including those from your instructor, will be sent through your university e-mail account. You are responsible for accessing that mail to be sure to obtain official University communications. Failure to access will not exempt individuals from the responsibilities associated with this course.