

The City in Medieval Islamic Thinking



This seminar focuses on the writing on the city at an especially critical historical juncture: when the dominant polity in most regions of the Islamic world depended primarily on legitimization through power (sultan). The class primarily revolves around a close reading of the Muqaddima (Introduction or Prolegomena) of ‘Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), in which he develops a new science that he calls ‘Ilm al-‘Umran (the Science of Civilization), which conceives of the city as the locus of civilization and politics. Most pertinent are Ibn Khaldun's views on history, geography, historiography, urbanity, and civilization, on the nomadic/settled dichotomy as an engine of state formation, on the characteristics and conditions of urban life, and on the rise and fall of cities as a function of the rise and fall of states. Further primary sources of the same period, such as al-Muqaddasi, al-Maqrizi, Ibn Tulun al-Salihi, and others, will be introduced to further elucidate the understanding of the city in the context of the social and political structures and the epistemology of the age.

The course is open to qualified undergraduates. Students are required to participate in the discussion, to report in writing on the weekly readings, and to develop a research paper to be presented in class and submitted at the end of the term. the term.

INSTRUCTOR:
Nasser Rabbat

TIME:
W 2 - 5

ROOM:
5-216

UNITS:
3-0-9 G