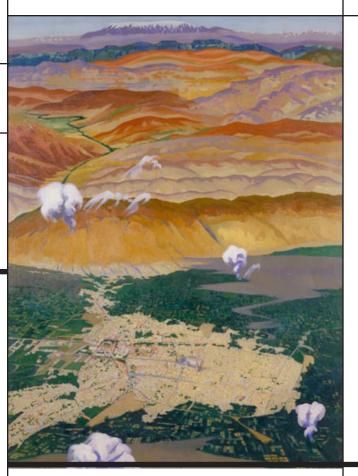# 4.617

Issues in Islamic Urbanism:

URBANISM IN THE AGE OF THE MILITARY STATE

The city was the locus of Islamic concepts of polity and society. Islam was originally constituted in the city of Yathrib renamed The City, al-Madina, as both a religion and a sociopolitical structure. This initial archetype was succeeded by a series of models that were either adopted from the various cultures with which Muslims came in contact or developed in response to new conditions. Thus we have cities that took up a military camp layout, others that preserved the Greco-Roman model, and still others that evolved out of Persian or Central Asian types. But the notion of madina seems never to have lost its paradigmatic prerogative, particularly in the writings of utopian jurists and philosophers in the medieval period or in the theorizing of historians and geographers in modern times.

This seminar focuses on urbanism at a particularly critical historical juncture, the period that could be termed the Age of the Military State (ca. 11-14 century), when the dominant polity in most regions of the Islamic world depended primarily on military legitimization. Through the examination of primary texts and architectural/archaeological data, we will study the forms and social structures of various important cities from the period. We will analyze how the new polity asserted itself over the diverse cultural alignments and various urban traditions that have shaped their forms and structures over time. We will probe how Muslims scholars conceptualized, understood, and represented these cities both as urban entities and as political and legal constructs.

Through our historical inquiry, we will critically review the modern literature on the Islamic City and evaluate its two general abstractions, the structural, informed by a Weberian notion of the ideal-type, and the formal, informed by a very circumscribed notion of archeology that was popular around the middle of the

SPRING 2010

TIME:	Wednesday 2:00-5:00
ROOM:	5-216
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PREREQUISITE:	Permission of Instructor

DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE

twentieth century. Finally, we will consider how a rather essentialist concept based on a set of fixed morphological and legal criteria attributed to Islam came to dominate the study of cities in Islamic history, and how it is being deconstructed in recent critical studies. The course is open to qualified undergraduates. Students are required to report orally and in writing on the weekly readings and to develop a research paper to be presented in class at the end of the term.

Required Texts: Ibn Khaldun. The Muqaddimah: an Introduction to History; translated by F Rosenthal ; abridged and edited by N. J. Dawood. (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1969). Ira Lapidus, Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages (Paperback) (Cambridge University Press, 1984).