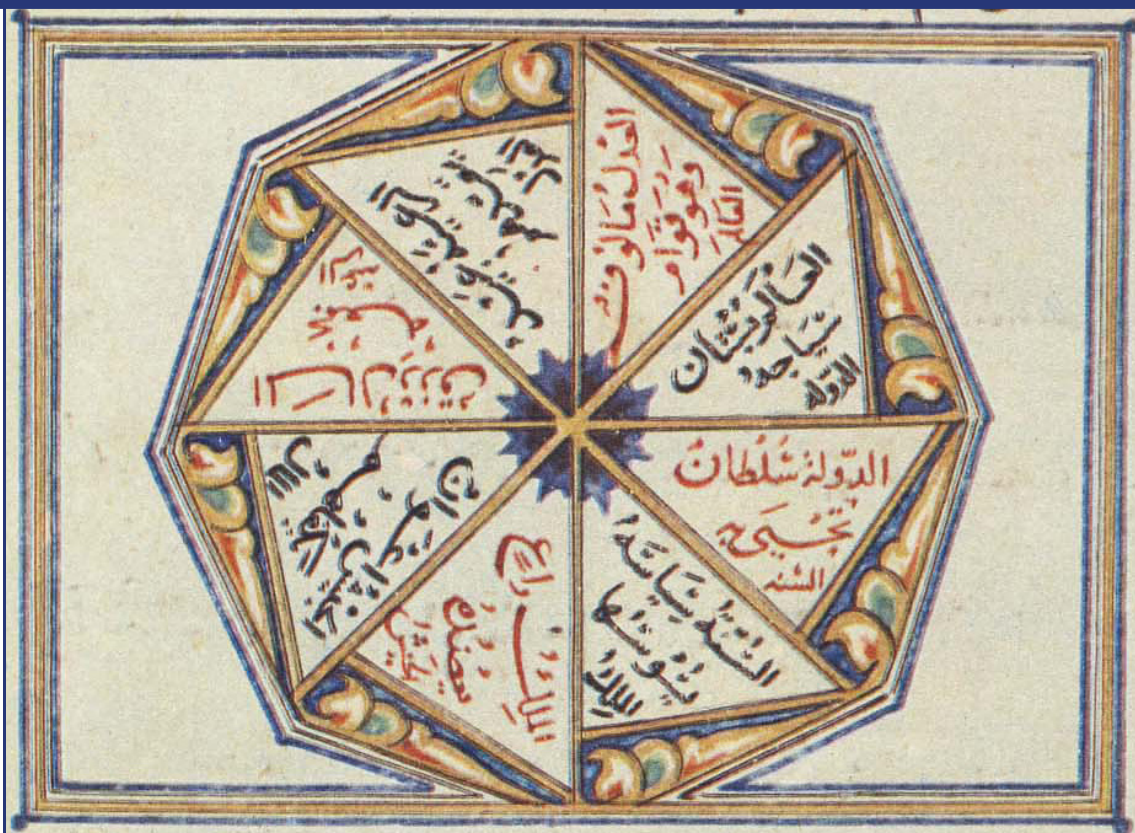


4.617

ISSUES IN ISLAMIC URBANISM

Reading Ibn Khaldun: City, State, Civilization

SPRING 2013



'Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) is one of the greatest philosophers of history and the founder of a new science that he called 'Ilm al-'Umran (the Science of Civilization), which conceives of the city as the locus of civilization. The Muqaddima (Introduction or Prolegomena) to his large historical survey of the Islamic states of his time, Kitab al-'Ibar, is a groundbreaking study on the sociology of history, which posits an overarching cycle of rise and fall of dynasties as a hermeneutical framework in explaining historical process. Profiting from Ibn Khaldun's long exposure to the politics of his age and his wide and profound readings in the historical, legal, theological, and literary works available to a Muslim scholar of his stature, the Muqaddima offers the most original pre-modern sociological treatment of politics, urban life, economics, and knowledge. Its fourth section in particular, dealing with the sociology of urban life, is a lucid analysis of the tripartite relationship between the city, the state, and civilization.

This seminar revolves around a close reading of Ibn Khaldun's Muqaddima in the context of the social and political structures and the epistemology of his age. 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. Secondary sources will be introduced to further explain Ibn Khaldun's terminology and concepts and to situate them in relation to their historical and Islamic milieu and to the genealogies of the various scholarly fields that the Muqaddima pioneered.

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.

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). Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974) Vols. 1 and 2.

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| DAY: | Wednesday |
| TIME: | 2:00-5:00 |
| ROOM: | 5-216 |
| INSTRUCTOR: | Nasser Rabbat nasser@mit.edu |
| E MAIL: | |
| LEVEL: | H |
| UNITS: | 3-0-9 or 3-0-6 |

PERMISSION OF INSTRUCTOR