

NES 389
Prof. Eve Krakowski
Spring 2021
MW 11-12:20

Everyday Writing in Medieval Egypt, 600-1500

This class explores medieval Islamic history from the bottom up—through everyday documents from Egypt produced and used by men and women at all levels of society: state decrees, personal and business letters, legal contracts, court records, and accounts. Even the smallest details of these everyday writings tell us big things about the world in which they were written. Each week will focus in depth on a particular document or cluster of documents that open different doors onto politics, religion, class, commerce, material history, and family relationships in Egypt from just before the Islamic conquests until the beginning of the Ottoman era.

Class requirements

1. Participation and preparation.

You must come to class prepared to discuss the assigned readings thoughtfully and in depth.

2. Weekly document annotations, due before class every Monday morning by 10:00 AM.

Each week you'll annotate one document drawn from the week's readings via the Perusall app on Canvas.

The goal of these annotations is to give you practice thinking deeply about documents as historical sources, and to prepare you to discuss the particular genre of source and/or topic we'll be focusing on that week. So there's no script for what to write—it's up to you. Your only instructions are to look at the document and read the translation of its text carefully, pointing out anything about both that strikes you as noteworthy (for example, features that explain why the document was written, what it might have accomplished, or how it may have been used; things about it you don't understand; details you think might have interesting historical implications; and anything else you like.)

3. In-class presentations of secondary scholarship.

Each student will take turns presenting the secondary scholarship (book sections and journal articles) we'll be reading alongside our documents. Each presentation should run around 15-20 minutes and will set the stage for our class discussions. You can show slides (or not) and use any visuals you like (relevant images, maps, funny memes, etc.). More detailed instructions and the dated list of presentations appear in the "Assignments" section of Canvas.

4. A final research paper (10-15 pages), due on Dean's date.

The final paper should use both documents and secondary scholarship to explore a historical topic or problem of your choice. You should meet with me sometime before or during **the week of April 5** to discuss your plans. Be prepared to give an oral presentation about your topic during the last class session.

Grading distribution

Attendance and active participation in class: 20%

Weekly annotations: 30%

Presentations of scholarly sources: 15%

Final paper: 35%

Weekly readings

Each week's readings are listed in the "Modules" section of Canvas. All readings are available electronically, either as PDFs attached to the week's module, or through the Princeton library website.

Feb. 1-3. Introduction to history through documents

Read:

- "Document of Wifehood" (Elephantine Papyri B28)
- Evans-Grubbs, *Women and the Law in the Roman Empire*, 122-135
- Bülow-Jacobson, "Writing Materials in the Ancient World" (Oxford Handbook of Papyrology)
- Cuvigny, "The Finds of Papyri: The Archaeology of Papyri" (Oxford Handbook of Papyrology)

Explore online:

- Embedding Conquest (read "Working with Collections": <https://emco.hcommons.org/2020/12/21/working-with-collections/> and explore the rest of the site)
- Trismegistos.org

Annotate:

- BGU IV.1050, on Perusall (due Wed. 2.3)

Feb 8-10. Early Islamic Egypt

Read:

- MacCoull, *Coptic Legal Documents*, 157-173
- Richter, "What's in a Story? Cultural Narratology and Coptic Child Donation Documents"
- Wilfong, *Women of Jeme*, 1-22, 95-116

Annotate:

- P KRU 78, on Perusall

Feb. 15-17. The early Islamic state

Listen to:

- The Ottoman History Podcast, “The Making of the Islamic World,” Episode 2 (The Imperial Caliphates): <https://www.ottomanhistorypodcast.com/p/the-making-of-islamic-world.html>

Read:

- Papaconstantinou, “Administering the Early Islamic Empire: Insights from the Papyri”
- Carlson, “When did the Middle East become Muslim?”
- Chrysostomides, “There is No God but God”: Islamisation and Religious Code-Switching, Eighth to Tenth Centuries”
- Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State* (Introduction, nos. 1-4, 8, 22-23, 31)

Annotate:

- Sijpesteijn, *Shaping*, no. 23

Feb. 22-24. The Fatimid empire

Guest lecture: Prof. Marina Rustow

Listen to:

- The Ottoman History Podcast, “The Making of the Islamic World,” Episode 4 (Fragments of the Fatimid Caliphate): <https://www.ottomanhistorypodcast.com/2020/12/fatimids.html>

Read:

- Stern, “A Fāṭimid Decree of the year 524/1130”
- Rustow, *The Lost Archive*, 83-110; 424-450

Annotate:

- T-S 28.8 (Khan, *Arabic Legal and Administrative Documents*, no. 98)

March 1-3. The law and the courts

Listen to:

- The Ottoman History Podcast, “The Making of the Islamic World,” Episode 8 (Life in the Mamluk Sultanate): <https://www.ottomanhistorypodcast.com/2020/11/life-in-mamluk-sultanate.html>

Read:

- Tillier, "The Qāḏīs' Justice According to Papyrological Sources"
- Khan, *ALAD*, nos. 1, 38, 50, 51, 58, 59, 60
- Lieberman, *Business of Identity*, docs. 3, 5-7
- Rapoport, "Legal Diversity in the Age of Taqlīd"

Annotate:

- T-S Ar. 38.71 (Khan, *Arabic Legal and Administrative Documents*, no. 59)

March 8-10. Marriage and divorce

Read:

- Rapoport, *Marriage, Money and Divorce in Medieval Islamic Society*, 1-30, 69-88
- Abbott, "Arabic Marriage Contracts Among Copts"
- Grohmann, *Arabic Papyri in the Egyptian Library* no. 41
- Friedman, "Pre-Nuptial Agreements with Grooms of Questionable Character: a Geniza Study"
- Younes, "Joy and Sorrow," nos. 1-2
- Goitein, "A Maghrebi Living in Cairo Implores his Karaite Wife to Return to him"
- PER H 82

Annotate:

- Marmer, "Patrilocal Residence and Jewish Court Documents from Medieval Cairo," doc. 1

March 17. Parents and children

Read:

- Goitein, "Parents and Children: A Geniza Study on the Medieval Jewish Family"
- Goitein, "The Tribulations of an Overseer of the Sultan's Ships: A Letter from the Cairo Geniza (written in Alexandria in 1131)"

March 22-24. Slavery

Guest lecture: Prof. Craig Perry

Read:

- Hagedorn, *Domestic Slavery in Syria and Egypt*, 79-112
- Little, "Six Fourteenth-Century Purchase Deeds for Slaves"
- Perry, "An Aramaic Bill of Sale for the Enslaved Woman Na'im"
- Gil, "Deathbed Will of the Wife of a Scholar"
- Goitein, "Side Lights on Jewish Education from the Cairo Genizah" - doc. 1 only

Annotate: T-S Misc. 23.8 (Perry)

No class March 29

March 31. Literacy and learning

Read:

- Goitein, “Side Lights on Jewish Education from the Cairo Genizah” (docs. 2-14)
- Olszowy-Schlanger, “Learning to Read and Write: Children’s Exercise Books from the Cairo Geniza”
- Liebrez, “An Archive in a Book”
- Liebrez, “An Arabic Letter (ca. AH 6th/12th CE c.) Concerning the Production of a Manuscript of Ibn Sīnā’s al-Šifā
- Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition*, 108-202

April 5-7. Lived religion, charity, and identity

Read:

- Cohen, *The Voice of the Poor in the Middle Ages*, Chapters 2 and 8
- Hofer, *The Popularisation of Sufism in Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt*, 61-102
- Goitein, “Addict to Sufism”
- Fernandes, “The foundation of Baybars al-Jashankir: Its waqf, history, and architecture”
- Goitein, “A Jewish Addict to Sufism”

Annotate:

- Kraemer, “A Jewish Cult of the Saints in Fatimid Egypt”

April 12-14. Trade

Read:

- Goldberg, *Trade and Institutions in the Medieval Mediterranean* 56-92, 337-361

Annotate:

- T-S 13 J 13.11 (Goldberg , Fig. 3.3)

April 19-21. The rural economy

- Rapoport, *Rural Economy and Tribal Society in Islamic Egypt*
- Hinds and Sakkout, *Arabic Documents from the Ottoman Period from Qaṣr Ibrīm*, 1-30

April 26. Final paper clinic