**History 0971N, Fall 2014**

**Warriors, Lovers, and Saints: The Middle Eastern Story-Cycle in Historical Context**

# Prof. Palmira Brummett, Sharpe House 309 (Angell St.), Palmira\_Brummett@brown.edu;

# Office Hours: Wednesday 2-4 P.M., or by appointment.

**Class meets**: Sayles 104, Tuesdays, 4 to 6:20 P.M.

**Welcome to History 0971 N.**

This is a class that explores the Middle East and its cultures through particular genres of literature (epic, popular romance, didactic). The relevant stories were produced primarily in the medieval period, but they exist in a long chain of story-telling that both preceded the advent of Islam and endured thereafter to have significant influence on Middle Eastern society until the present day. We will examine these stories in their historical contexts, discussing (among other subjects) the nature of rule, the organization of society, the layering of Islam onto earlier religious beliefs and practices, and the Western appropriation of the Middle Eastern story through translation. Our focus is the stories themselves --- what do they tell us about society and its values? But in each class historical context will be provided for the stories, their ideas and their characters. As we read examples taken from Arabic, Persian, and Turkish language sources in translation, we will focus on particular topics: warrior ethos, honor, the gendering of power and relationships, masculine and feminine ideals, the *sufi* (mystical) path and its effects on the individual, the nature of love and of justice, the notion of the “foreign,” and the ways in which animals are perceived as crucial social actors and activists. Active discussion; several short (1-1&1/2 page), analytical responses to the assigned readings due at the beginning of class; and a final analytical essay (7 pages) on a topic chosen in consultation with the professor are required. Depending on class size we will have a session where a short oral presentation of your project will be “performed” in class at the end of the semester. We will collaborate for one of the last class sessions to assemble examples of the enduring power of these stories in contemporary Middle Eastern narrative, film, and other imagery, and to see how they can affect identity formation, national pride, popular culture, and the critique of Western imperialism.

Note: syllabus/readings are subject to some adjustment as class evolves depending on enrollment and our level of “getting in” to the sources.

**Materials (Required):**

Texts: Available at Brown Book Store, or order your own copies, all available used**.**

*Arabian Nights Entertainments*, Robert Mack, ed. (Oxford U. Press, 2009).

Nizami, *The Story of* *Layla and Majnun* (Omega Publications, 1997).

Ferdowsi, *The Legend of Seyavash* (New York: Penguin, 1992, 2004).

Additional materials will be made available on Online Course Reserves (OCRA): **Password is Ferdowsi**. **Use the list of assignments below to determine which OCRA readings are required, some are supplementary**. The Hourani selections provide background. We will watch some short film clips in class.

**Class Organization:**

This is a class that depends upon your active participation. Regular attendance is required, esp. because this class meets only once a week. A seminar class allows us to interact intensively and thus both hone our critical thinking skills and integrate the interpretations of others into our thinking. You do not need to be acquainted with the Middle East or its literatures. Rather you need to be analytical and reflective. Note that laptops are permissible during class only for pursuing class readings and topics – not for “multi-tasking!” As we discuss these stories we want to give each other our full attention. Your oral participation counts.

**Grade Percentages**:

Class Participation 25%

Short Written Responses (6 x 6 points each) 36%

Contribution to Collaborative Project, week 11 06%

Final Project 33%

**Schedule and Assignments (to be completed before class session):**

**Week 1**  Introduction: From Epic to Story to National Identity, Middle East Precedents 9/9

[culture: the universal and the particular; layers of religious identity; and the role of the West]

Look over: Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (New York: Warner, 1991), 5, 35-37, 65-75, 81-97, 147-157, 485-490 [Hourani will be a useful reference for you throughout the semester.]

**Week 2** The Age of Heroes and the Search for Heroines 9/16

Read: *The Adventures of Sayf Ben Dhi Yazan: An Arab Folk Epic*, trans. Lena Jayyusi (Indiana University Press, 1999), ix-xix, 1-40; Dwight Reynolds, “Epic and History in the Arabic Tradition,” 392-410, in *Epic and History*, Konstan and Raaflaub, eds.( Blackwell, 2010); and Reynolds*, Heroic Poets, Poetic Heroes: The Ethnography of Performance in an Arabic Oral Epic Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell U. Press, 1995), 211-212 (in class handout).

Write: Response Paper 1 on *The Adventures* (nature of society: violence, gender, religion).

**Week 3** Whose Arabian Nights? Gender, Society, Humor, and Western Orientalism 9/23

Read: *Arabian Nights Entertainments*, Robert Mack, ed. (Oxford U. Press, 2009), ix-xxv, 1-19, 86-105, 125-140; and N.J. Dawood, *Tales from the Thousand and One Nights* (New York: Penguin, 1973), 106-112: “The Young Woman and Her Five Lovers.”

Write: Response Paper 2 on *Arabian Nights* (characterization of women and of society).

**Week 4** Arabian Nights II: Justice and the Exercise of Political Power 9/30

Read: Mack, *Arabian Nights Entertainments*, 179-186, 222-228, 535-583, 787-796; and Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, 5, 35-37, 81-97.

**Week 5: No Class**, work on preparing next weeks’ reading and paper. 10/7

**Week 6** Lovers and Sufis: The Evolution of Story and the Mystical Message of Islam 10/14

Read: Nizami, *The Story of* *Layla and Majnun* (Omega Publications, 1997); and Hourani, 65-75, 147-157.

Write: Response Paper 3 on *Layla and Majnun* (gender roles, love, mysticism, and animals)

**Week 7** The Rights of Animals: Testing the Limits of Creation and Sacred Text 10/21

Read: *The Case of the Animals vs. Man Before the King of the Jinn, A Translation from the Epistles of the Brothers of Purity,* Lenn Goodman and Richard McGregor, trans. (Oxford U. Press, 2009), xi-xiii, 1-3, 29, 99-121, 127-131, 146-150, 156,182-188, 232-237, 251-254, 311-315; and Ibn al-Muqaffaʻ, *Kalila wa Dimna: Fables from a Fourteenth Century Arabic Manuscript,* Esin Atil, ed. and trans., (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian, 1981), 9-10, 38-45, 52-54.

Write: Response Paper 4 on *The Case of the Animals*. (justice and virtue).

[Images from the Bodleian Library’s *Khalila wa Dimna*, see: http://bodleian.thejewishmuseum.org/?p=38]

**Week 8** A Mirror for Princes: The Book of Kings (*Shahnameh*) I: Justice and Tyranny 10/28

Read: Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings,* Dick Davis, trans. (Penguin, 2007), (selections): ix-xxxvii, 9-27, 544-553; and Kai Kā’ūs ibn Iskandar, *A Mirror for Princes: The Qābūs Nāma*, trans. Reuben Levy (London: Cresset Press, 1951), (selections): ix-xvii, 1, 70-74, 77-8, 117-19, 132-35, 222-29.

Write: Response Paper 5 on *Shahnameh,* pages9-27 (tyranny).

**We will discuss your final projects.**

Week 9 The Book of Kings (*Shahnameh*) II: Lovers, Warriors, Nature, & the Birds and Beasts 11/4

Read: *Shahnameh*, 63-69, 187-195, 441-454; and Bijan Najdi, Chs. 7-8, in Mohammad Khorrami, ed. and trans., *Sohrab’s Wars: Counter Discourses of Contemporary Persian Fiction* (Costa Mesa, CA.: Mazda, 2008), 83-100.

Also bring to class: Reading from the Qābūs Nāma from last week.

**Week 10** The Book of Kings (and Queens) III: Virtue, Loyalty, Fate, and Sacrifice 11/11

Read: Ferdowsi, *The Legend of Seyavash* (New York: Penguin, 1992), xxix-xxxii, 1-59.

Write: Response Paper 6, *Seyavash* (honor, fate, and gender roles).

Week 11 Turkic Epic: Islamization, the “West,” and the Steppe Heroine 11/18

Read: *The Book of Dede Korkut, A Turkish Epic,*  Faruk Sümer, Uysal, and Walker, eds. (U. Texas Press, 1991), 23-57, 63-69; Ahmet Karamustafa, “Sarı Saltık Becomes a Friend of God,” 136-144, in John Renard, ed., *Tales of God’s Friends* (Berkeley: U. Cal Press, 2009); and John Alden Williams, ed., *Themes of Islamic Civilization* (Berkeley: U. Cal. Press, 1971), 344-347.

[I will provide handouts of the introduction and notes to Dede Korkut, pp. ix-xxiii, and 177-180, 185-194.]

Week 12 The Cinematic Sultan, National Identity, and the Invention of Tradition 11/25

Read: Aslihan Tokgöz Onaran, “Counterpatriarchal Pleasures of Muslim Turkish Women: A Feminist Ethnography of Rural Women Watching Daytime Television,” *Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World* 9 (2011): 171-193.

Film clips: Süleiman the Sexy in *Muhteşem Yüzyil*, and the American occupation of Iraq in *Valley of the Wolves: Iraq (Kurtlar Vadisi Irak),* directed by Serdar Akar.

[We will discuss any questions regarding the Week 13 project.]

Week 13 Epic Ideals in the Modern Middle East 12/2

[A joint class project to explore the contemporary possibilities of enduring story -cycles and ideologies in contemporary Middle Eastern narratives, visuals, media.]

**Week 14, Reading Period,** **Presentations** 12/9 (depending on class size, some presentations may go earlier).

**Final Papers Due: Tuesday 12/16 by noon.**

## Logistics

I can and will help you if you have questions or difficulties in this class. Please come see me if you need help, or just to chat about your interests. If you cannot come during my office hours, we can arrange an appointment at a different time.

Be sure to keep a copy (for yourself) of each of your papers before you hand it in.

Save all graded papers that have been handed back until the end of the semester.

Always bring the assigned texts or reading materials to class. We will refer to them often.

**Laptops may be used to access the required readings, but that may slow you down in class. It is sometimes easier to print out the OCRA readings for ease of access and note-making.**

**Note**: Plagiarism is taking credit (directly or indirectly) for the words and ideas of others. Because many of our assignments will be based on your interaction with and evaluation of a single source, sometimes a full bibliographic citation will be all that is needed. Direct quotes, however, must always be cited; and whenever there is any question about whether attribution is needed it is always best to err on the side of caution. There should never be any doubt regarding which parts of your paper are truly yours. For your final project, footnotes (or endnotes), using *Chicago Manual of* *Style* format, will be required.

**Short Papers**:

The basic short response paper format is as follows:

Type (10-12 point type, 1 & ½ or double spaced) no more than 1 & 1/2 pages; 1” margins.

**Begin with your name and full bibliographic information on your source**: author, title, place, date, publisher. If you use short quotes, then you need only indicate the page(s) in parentheses , e.g. (p. 23).

I will assign a question for each of the short papers which will address one of the readings assigned for that particular week. You will be asked to reflect on particular themes and cultural values reflected in the narrative. Be specific. Papers are due in class on the day assigned, in hard copy.

**Final Project Essay and Oral Presentations (instructions on a separate sheet will be provided)**:

The final project is your opportunity to assess more expansively one of the themes we have developed in class using one of the story-cycles we have not already read (e.g., from the *Shahnameh or Arabian Nights*), another story cycle (e.g., the *Adventures of Antar*), or possibly a piece of modern Arabic, Persian, or Turkish literature in translation (e.g., Gamal al-Ghitani, *Zayni Barakat*, or Yusuf al-Qa’id, W*ar in the Land of Egypt*) to see how well epic values translate into the modern era. The short response papers will prepare you for developing your final project. You will choose a source and the topic on which you wish to write in consultation with the professor, and “present your stuff” (maximum 10 minutes including questions, depending on class size) to the class in the last regular session(s) of the term. Your presentation will focus on what is most intriguing about what you have found so far. Think of it as a way to challenge yourself and distinguish yourself among your colleagues. The written version of your final project will be approximately 7-8 pages. Aim for clarity and power!

[If you have innovative ideas about the topic material for your final project, I am open to suggestions; but you’ll need to clear the project proposal with me in a timely fashion (in part to make sure it is do-able).]