

Barbara R. von Schlegell

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Topics in Islamic Religion and Society: Women in Islam

Religious Studies 49 (Women's Studies 49)

Course Description

Since medieval times, nothing about Islam has perplexed the West more than the role of women. We consider the current Western view of Muslim women as victims before reading translated Islamic texts on gender and historical evidence of women's religious and social activities since the sixth century. These works include the Eve and Virgin Mary narratives in the Qur'an, legalist works on the ideal Muslim wife and mother, and biographies of women warriors, political leaders, religious scholars and Sufi mystics. Muslim apologists and feminists use such materials in varying ways. Attitudes toward the body--involving sexuality, purity, fertility and seclusion--will be examined in a comparative context. Finally, we look at how women's economic power and their participation in modern revivalist movements are bringing about new identities for Muslim women worldwide.

Course Requirements and Evaluation

- Students will be required to maintain a journal for the duration of the course, as well as write two brief papers.
- Students are evaluated on the basis of journal reviews of the readings and of the films; class participation and discussion; and two brief research papers.

All textbooks, and many others on Islamic topics, are on reserve for this class under "von Schlegell" in Rosengarten Reading Room, Van Pelt Library. Textbooks for purchase are listed below under "Readings."

Unless otherwise stated, all textbooks are available for purchase at the Penn Book Center, 3726 Walnut Street Telephone 222-7600

The Bulkpack is for available for purchase at University Copy Service, Houston Hall Telephone 898-5320 or 898-5574

Course Outline

Week I: Introduction: Islam and Muslim Women

Film "The Smithsonian World of Islam"

Readings

- For background in Islam, read either H.A.R. Gibb *Mohammedanism* (in spite of its unfortunate title, an excellent little book) or J. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path* (both on reserve in Rosengarten)

Week II: Women in Islamic History Part One: The Family of the Prophet, Women in Early Politics and Society

Readings

- Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite*
- Denise Spellberg, "Political Action and Public Example: A'isha and the Battle of the Camel," in
- N. Keddie, *Women in Middle Eastern History*, pp.47-57
- Bulkpack: Barbara Stowasser, "The Mothers of the Believers" *Muslim World* and "Sermon from Canada" from the Net

Week III: Women in Islamic History Part Two: *Muhaddithat* (women scholars of the *hadith*), *faqihat* (women scholars of Islamic Law), and Women in the Sufi Movement

Readings

- Jonathan Berkey, "Women and Islamic Education in the Mamluk Period," in Keddie, pp. 143-160
- Nikki Keddie, "Introduction: Deciphering Middle Eastern Women's History," in Keddie, pp. 1-23
- Bulkpack: F. Mernissi, "How Does One Say 'Queen' in Islam?" from *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*
H. Turabi, "Women in Islam and Muslim Society" M. Siddiqi, "Women Scholars of Hadith" from *Hadith Literature*; R. Roded, "Mystic Women" from *Women in Islamic Biographical Collections*; Serenity Young, "Biographies of Sufi Women"

Week IV: Women and the Economy From Early Islam to Modern Times

Readings

- Carl Petry, "Women as Custodians of Property in Medieval Egypt," in Keddie, pp. 122-142

- Leila Ahmed, "Medieval Islam" from *Women and Gender in Islam*
- Valentine Moghadem, "Economic Development" from *Modernizing Women*
- Bulk Pack: Shatzmiller, "Aspects of Women's Participation in the Economic Life of Later Medieval Islam:: Occupations and Mentalities;" Goitein, "Professions of Women;" Lutfi, "Al-Sakhawi's *Kitab al-Nisa'* as a Source for the Social and Economic History of Muslim Women during the 15th c. AD"

Week V: Male and Female: Can God be Gendered? Can Human Experience be Gendered?

Journal due

Film: "In Her Own Time"

Readings

- Amina Wadud-Muhsin, *Qur'an and Woman* (begin)
- Bulk Pack: McFague, "God as Mother;" Umansky, "Creating a Jewish Feminist Theology;" and Murata, "Divine Duality," "Macrocosmic Marriage," and "Human Marriage" from *The Tao of Islam: A Source book on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought*

Week VI: Qur'anic Women Female Figures in the Qur'an: Reception and Modern Reinterpretation of Scripture

First Paper due

Readings

- Amina Wadud-Muhsin (continued)
- Bulk Pack: Smith and Haddad, "The Virgin Mary in Islamic Tradition and Commentary;" Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation* (Women of Noah, Lot, and Abraham; Bilqis; and Mary); Ali *Qur'an: The Fundamental Law of Human Life* (Surat al-Nisa')

Week VII: Sexuality in Islam Circumcision, Menstruation, Virginity, and Illicit Sex

Readings

- Lila Abu-Lughod, *Writing Women's Worlds*
- Bulk Pack: Coulson, "Regulation of Sexual Behavior under Traditional Islamic Law;" Bellamy, "Sex and Society in Islamic Popular Literature;" Anees, "Circumcision: The Clitoral Inferno;" Toubia, "Female Circumcision as a Public Health Issue;" and Reinhart, "Impurity/No Danger"

Week VIII: Muslim Family Life: Marriage, Birth Control and Abortion, Giving Birth, and Divorce

Journal due

Film: "The Price of Change"

Readings

- Lila Abu-Lughod (continued)
- Bulk Pack: Greer, "A Child is Born" from *Sex and Destiny*; Wegner "Introduction" from *Chattel or Person? The Status of Women in the Mishnah* and "The Status of Women in Jewish and Islamic Marriage and Divorce Law;" Esposito, "Classical Muslim Family Law;" Khomeini, "Precepts of

Wedding or Marriage and Matrimony" from *A Clarification of Questions*, Musallam, "Contraception and the Rights of Women" from *Sex and Society in Islam*; Rispler-Chaim, *Islamic Medical Ethics in the 20th Century*

Week IX: Woman to Woman Religious Lives, Sex Segregation and Parallel Society, Pilgrimage

Film "Guests of God"

Reading

- Julia Clancy-Smith, "House of Zeinab," in *Keddie*, pp. 254-274
- B.R. von Schlegell "Female Sufi Masters in Damascus"
- Bulk Pack: Betteridge, "Women and Shrines in Shiraz;" El-Sanabary, "The Saudi Model of Female Education and the Reproduction of Gender Divisions"

Week X: Harem Western Fantasy, "Our Moslem Sisters" and Orientalism

Readings

- Bulk Pack: Sommer and Zwemer, "Introduction" from *Our Moslem Sisters: A Cry of Need from the Lands of Darkness*; Arebi, "Gender Anthropology in the Middle East: The Politics of Muslim Women's Misrepresentation;" Johnson, "The Cloistering of Medieval Nuns" and Pierce, "Beyond Harem Walls: Ottoman Royal Women and the Exercise of Power" from *Gendered Domains*

Week XI: What Does a Veil Mean? Modesty and Islamic Dress

Film "The Veiled Revolution"

Readings

- Leila Ahmed, "The Discourse of the Veil," Chap. 8 of *Women and Gender in Islam*
- Bulk Pack: Sherif, "What is *Hijab*;" Williams "Veiling in Egypt as a Political and Social Phenomenon"

Week XII: "Fundamentalist" Women Spiritual and Political Revival in the Late 20th Century

Journal due

Film: "Door to the Sky" (evening session with banquet)

Readings

- Leila Ahmed, "Divergent Voices", Chap. 10 in *Women and Gender in Islam*
- V. Moghadem, "Islamist Movements and Women's Responses" and "Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran" in *Modernizing Women*
- Bulk Pack: Badran, "Independent Women: More than a Century of Feminism in Egypt;" Zuhur, "Construction of the Virtuous Woman" from *Revealing Reveiling: Islamist Gender Ideology in Contemporary Egypt*; Acar, "Women in the Ideology of Islamic Revivalism in Turkey;" Afshar, *Women in the Middle East: Perceptions, Realities and Struggles for Liberation*; McCloud, "African-American Muslim Women"

Week XII:

