Classics 192 (Fall 2003)
“From Alexandria to Baghdad”: Classical Sciences in Islamic Lands

Tuesdays & Thursdays, 12-1: One Bow Street, #330
For further inquiries contact instructor:
Elaheh Kheirandish kheirand@fas

A new course on the transmission and transformation of classical sciences in the Islamic Middle Ages, with a focus on the early scientific traditions and institutions of Arabic and Persian speaking lands. The course includes a review of literature and reading of selected sources (in English), with attention to cross-cultural and inter-cultural contexts.

(Image: A frontispiece honoring nine Greek physicians from Arabic copy of the Pseudo-Galen Book of Antidotes.)
Unit I (Weeks 1-3): Themes (Tradition, Transmission, Transformation)

Week 1: Continuity and Discontinuity
9/16: A Western Intellectual Tradition in a Non-Western Setting
9/18: Greek Mathematical, Philosophical, and Medical Sciences in Arabic Traditions

Week 2: Transmission and Transformation
9/23: Textual Transmission–From Alexandria to Baghdad and Beyond
9/25: Conceptual Transformation–Beyond The “Intermediate” Tradition

Week 3: Commensurability and Incommensurability
9/30: Intellectual Commensurability–“Unity of Knowledge”
10/2: Cultural Incommensurability–“In our Language”

*Unit I Handout: Translational Transferability* (3-5 page Response due 10/6: 10%)

Unit II (Weeks 4-6): Themes (Reception, Appropriation, Naturalization)

Week 4: Reception, Appropriation, Naturalization
10/7: Greek Thought, Arabic Culture
10/9: The “Miracle” and the “Decline”

Week 5: Science and Context
10/14: Science Agents–Science Authors, Scientific Sources
10/16: Context Agents–Science Sponsors, Institutional Settings

Week 6: Science, Philosophy, Religion
10/21: Science, Philosophy–Knowledge and Utility
10/23: Science and Religion–Tolerance and Authority

**Unit II Handout: Questioning Authority** (3-5 page Response: due 10/27: 10%)

Unit III (Weeks 7-9): Case Studies (Mathematical, Philosophical, Medical Traditions)

Week 7: Mathematical and Philosophical Traditions
10/28: Geometric Algebra
10/30: Demonstrative Sciences
Week 8: Mixed Mathematical-Physical Traditions
11/4: Optics
11/6: Mechanics

Week 9: Medical and Natural-philosophical Traditions
11/11: Anatomy and Ophthalmology
11/13: Biology and Psychology

***Unit III Handout: Distorting History?*** (3-5 page Response due 11/17: 10%)

Unit IV (Weeks 10-12): Case Studies–Cross-Cultural and Inter-Cultural Settings

Week 10: Cross-Cultural Settings
11/18: Greek Scientific Traditions in Arabic and Persian Sources
11/20: Arabic Scientific Traditions in Latin Sources

Week 11: Inter-Cultural Settings
11/25: Arabic Scientific Traditions in Persian Sources and Vice-versa
11/27: Thanksgiving Break

Week 12: A Western Intellectual Tradition in a Non-Western Setting
12/2: A Western Intellectual Tradition
12/4: A Non-Western Setting

****Unit IV Handout: Decline: Quantity vs. Quality**** (3-5 page Response due 12/8: 10%)
Kāshī’s (d.1436), Letter to his father (A Newly Found Letter of Al-Kāshī on Scientific Life in Samarqand)

Unit V (Weeks 13-15): Themes Examined through Cases–“Why/“Why-Not” Questions

Week 13: Themes–The “Why” and “Why-Not” Questions
12/9: The Translation Movement–Knowledge, Patronage, Ideology, Diversity
12/11: The Decline Arguments–Instability, Economy, Institutions, Communication

Week 14: The Arguments and the Evidence
12/16: Self-selected Case Studies (based on weekly lectures: 20%)
12/18: Winter Break

Weeks 15-16: Reading period
1/6: Self-selected Case Studies (based on weekly lectures: 20%)
1/8, 1/13, 1/15: Office Hours
Weeks 17-18: Exam period
1/20, 1/22
1/27: Final Exam (options for essay questions: 40%)

Readings: Copies on reserve in the Classics Department, Lamont and Hilles Libraries.
Grading: Weekly Attendance/Self-selected Case-study (20%); 4 Handout Essays (40%);
Final Exam (40%)

University Schedule (2003-2004):
First Day of Classes: Mon. Sep.15
Thanksgiving Break: Thurs. Nov. 27–Sun. Nov. 30
Final Exams: Jan.17-Jan. 27