

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE CITY **in Literature, Art and Architecture** **[NEJS 161b]**

A new course for undergraduate students. To be given for the first time in the Spring of 2008. Particularly relevant for prospective students of the Near East, Literature and Fine Arts, and General Humanities. Fulfills the Non-Western Comparative Cultures requirement.

Meetings: Tuesdays and Fridays, 9: 00am-10:30 am.

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Course Description

The city is an artifact housing a community of anonymous persons, one that has carried great creative and destructive potential across the ages. Works of the imagination--in literature, theology, and architecture--expose unquantifiable dimensions of that potential. In this course we examine ten such works with a view to what the city has been in the past, is today, and can become in the future.

Course Requirements

• **Attendance and participation**

Regular class attendance, doing the reading, and participation in class. Assigned reading must be completed before class. During the semester, each student is expected to make at least two presentations (see dates in syllabus below), and lead the discussion that follows.

30% of final grade

• **Weekly Postings**

In the course of the semester each student is expected to submit 10 weekly 1 page postings/commentaries in e-mail form on the reading (and on written class assignments handed out in class). These must discuss and/or 'construct' questions/comments derived from the reading. Think of these pages as your own running commentary on the reading. Keep a copy. I will want to see these again, grouped in chronological sequence, and nicely formatted at the end of the semester. I must receive your commentary no later than 9:00am on Monday in order to form the basis of our discussion the following day. Always identify yourself and the readings being discussed at the outset (include e-mail and a telephone number). **Number** and **date** each reading. The commentaries are not individually graded. But students lose grades by doing them sloppily or not submitting them. There is no point to a late submission. This requirement cannot be made up at a later date.

30% of final grade

• **Papers**

Each student must write three papers one of which is in the form of a Chronology. See attached sheet for Paper Topics. Paper 1 will be presented to class on January 29, and submitted at the end of class on that day. Paper 2, the Chronology exercise, is due on Feb. 26. Paper 3 is due on April 29.

40% of final grade

On The Reading

All the reading is on reserve. The reading entered under each week is intended for discussion on the Tuesday of the following week. I must receive your weekly postings the day before, by Monday 11:00am. Fridays are generally reserved for lectures.

For example: You will start reading Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (listed under Week 1) right away. You will e-mail your comments so that I receive them by 11:00 am on Monday January 21 (the first class of Week 2). We will discuss those comments during class on Tuesday, January 22. On Friday, January 25, we will discuss "City Origins As Myth," the title of Week 2.

• Film Viewings

Students must watch three films and can choose to write about them in their weekly commentaries. The showings are being organized through the Crown Centre. Times to be decided. The films will be discussed in class. The tentative film list is:

Marwan Hamed, *Yacoubian Building*, 2006, based on the novel by the same name written by Alaa al-Aswani

West Beirut

Baghdad Fragments. Details to follow

Pontecorvo, *The Battle of Algiers*, 1967.

SYLLABUS

I INTRODUCTION beginning Tues, Jan.15 for one week

What is a City? Definitions and ways of thinking about cities. Calvino's modern fables on The City and Matrakci's 16th century illustrations of cities.

Reading

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* . Students are expected to read the whole book.

II CITY ORIGINS beginning Tues, Jan. 22 for 2 weeks

Calvino's fables and city myths of origin. Babylon's "poem" of creation. The story of Babylon as the first city. The Bible and the City. Genesis versus the Babylonian account of creation. The transformation of Babylon and its tower into a universal metaphor for the sinful city. Jerusalem as the antithesis of Babylon. The appearance of the city in the archaeological record. The monument as the first truly urban artefact.. Babylon and its tower.

Reading

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* .

The 'Introduction to The Babylonian Creation,' and the poem itself, 'The Babylonian Creation,' in N.K. Sanders in *Poems of Heaven and Hell From Ancient Mesopotamia* (Penguin Classics)

Account of The Tower of Babel in the Book of Genesis, chapter 11, *The Bible* (any of the scholarly editions).

Lewis Mumford, *The City in History* (chapters 1 through 4).

NOTE: There is no class on Friday January 25. Students are to work on Paper 1, which is due on Tuesday, January 29. To be presented to class by each student on the same day.

III ALEXANDRIA beginning Tues. February 5 for one week

Ancient Alexandria in the Western imagination. The first cosmopolitan city. Contrasting Babylon to Alexandria.

Reading

C.P. Cavafy, *Collected Poems* (Chatto & Windus). The following poems on or about Alexandria: 'The City' p. (p.21), 'The God Abandons Antony' (p.27), 'Ithaka' (p.29), 'Alexandrian Kings' (p.33), 'Aimilianos Monai, Alexandrian, A.D.628-655' (p.65), 'Of the Jews (A.D.50)' (p.71), 'Days of 1909, 10, and 11' (p.117), 'Myris: Alexandria, A.D. 340' (p118), 'In the Same Space' (p.122), 'To Have Taken the Trouble' (p.125).

E.M. Forster, *Pharos and Pharillon: An Evocation of Alexandria* (Bristol: Michael Haag, 1923. Republished 1983). Available on LATTE

IV HOLY CITIES: Jerusalem and Mecca beginning Tues, Feb 12 for 4 weeks

What makes a city holy? Cities in a desert world. The emergence of Mecca around the focus of a pre-Islamic sacred sanctuary. The consequences of a sacred axis. Mecca as a city whose sole reason for existence is to be travelled to, and prayed towards. The effect of a sacred location and/or direction on the form and meaning of a city.

Jerusalem as the first axis of prayer for Islam. The conquest of the city. The entry of the Caliph Umar into Jerusalem in 638 and his "tour" of the holy sites in the company of Sophronius, Patriarch of the city. The sanctity of Jerusalem in Islam.

The first Muslim monument. What did the Dome of the Rock mean to the generation that built it. What does it mean today? The Dome of the Rock as a symbol of Jerusalem. The impact of Islam's first major aesthetic statement, the Dome of the Rock, on the art and architecture of Islam.

Reading

Mircea Eliade, Introduction & 'Sacred Space and Making the World Sacred,' in *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (Harcourt Brace, 1987), pp. 8-65. Available on LATTE.

Eric Schroeder, 'Introduction,' 'The Desert,' and extracts from 'The Fight For Life,' in *Muhammad's People: A Tale By Anthology*, pp. x-xiii, 1-22, and 116-145. Available on LATTE

F.E.Peters, chapter 1, 'A Speculative History of Mecca in the Age of Ignorance,' in *Mecca: A Literary History of the Muslim Holy Land* (Princeton), pp.3-56. Available on LATTE

Kanan Makiya, *The Rock: A Tale of Jerusalem in the Seventh Century* (Pantheon, 2001). Read 'A Historical Note on Ka'b and the Rock,' and through to the chapter entitled, 'Tour of the City.' Finish the book.

NOTE: There is no class on Friday, February 29. Students are to work on Paper 2, the Chronology Exercise, which is due on Tuesday, March 4.

V MODERN CAIRO beginning Tues, March 11 for 2 weeks

Cairo during the turbulent years of 1952-2002. A survey of the city's social and political movements through the prism of one apartment block building on Tal'at Harb street built in 934. Students will read al-Aswani's novel and write a book review of Rodenbeck's portrait of Cairo.

Reading:

Alaa al-Aswani, Yacoubian Building.

Max Rodenbeck, *Cairo* (Picador)

On Saturday, March 15, there will be a 3-hour makeup class followed by dinner at Professor Makiya's home. Class will run from 3pm-6pm. Details to follow.

VI CIVIL WAR BEIRUT beginning Tues, March 25 for one week

Civil war Beirut (1975-1988). Urban apocalypse through history beginning with the destruction of cities in the Bible. Plague and the dying in Boccaccio, Edgar Allen Poe, Bergman, and Camus. Dresden, Hiroshima, and Kuwait City as examples of Urban Apocalypse. New York and the destruction of the World Trade Center.

Reading:

Jean Said Makdisi, *Beirut Fragments: A War Memoir*

Mai Ghossoub, *Leaving Beirut* (Saqi Books)

VII 20th CENTURY BAGHDAD beginning Tues, April 1 for two weeks

Reading

W.H.Auden, 'The Poet and the City', in *The Dyer's Hand and other Essays* (New York: Vintage Books), pp.72-89. Available on LATTE

Sassoon Somekh *Baghdad Yesterday: The Making of an Arab Jew* (Ibis Editions, 2007)

Kanan Makiya, *The Monument: Art, Vulgarity and Responsibility in Iraq* (Tauris)

STUDENT PRESENTATIONS for Paper 3 begin Tues, April 15, The Final Paper is due on April 29.