



**Search and Research:  
A Journey in Muslim Civilizations**  
RLG & HIS 299Y, 399Y & 499Y (Online)  
Summer 2013

## Course Outline

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### I. Course Description

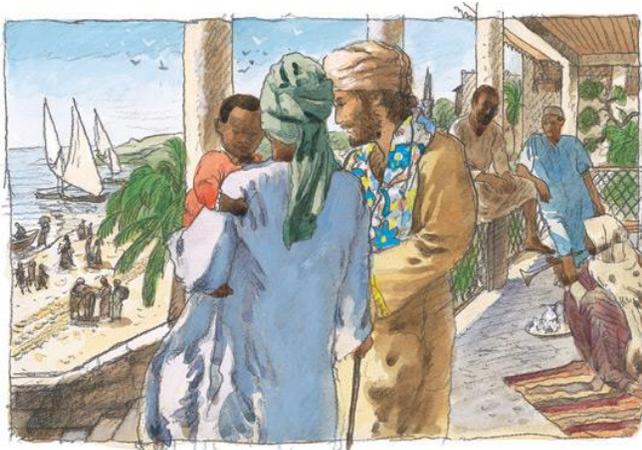


Figure 1: Artist's impression of Ibn Battuta's travels along the East African coast. Illustrated by Norman MacDonald for the July/August 2000 issue of *Saudi Aramco World*.

As the world grows ever smaller and people of diverse religions, cultures, races and social classes are brought closer together, the need to understand and appreciate the pluralism of humankind has never been more pressing. Rudyard Kipling's famous dictum, "East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet," sounds quite naïve nowadays. Today, about one in five human beings, numbering over one billion people worldwide, practice the religion of Islam. Yet, information about Islam in the West is woefully lacking. Though news headlines are often dominated by stories from parts of the Islamic world, such "crisis reporting" often obscures, rather than clarifies, our understanding of this faith and civilization.

Among those who, quite literally, crossed the boundaries from the known world to the realm of the unknown were the great adventurers of medieval times, heroic figures like Ibn Battuta, Marco Polo and Nasir-i Khusraw. These travellers traversed vast regions, encountering the peoples, cultures, religions, literatures, art, and architecture of many lands. Equally important, they recorded their experiences to share with others, and their travelogues are among the greatest treasures bequeathed to posterity. These accounts give us rare insights into worlds that are at once both enticingly foreign, yet somehow uncannily familiar.

In many ways, our course is a journey of this nature - but an intellectual journey. Unlike many other courses you may have taken, this is a research course and involves experiential learning, which means that you may often need to navigate uncharted waters. All students will undertake voyages of discovery, and even your instructors cannot say with certainty exactly what you will encounter along the way or where you will end up. However, what we will do is provide you with instructions on the purpose of your voyage, guidance on what your journey will entail, some preliminary maps to help you chart your way, tools to negotiate the difficult passages, and support and advice every step of the way. Both you and your instructors will manoeuvre through the shoals and eddies associated with the fact that this is the University of Toronto's first-ever online course in History or Religion. Discoveries and sharing of what we learn will be undertaken using virtual tools. While all students will embark on their own paths, one might say that there are three primary types of intellectual journeys on which they may embark:



Figure 2: A *baghala*, one of the most exquisite types of dhows, with a richly-carved stern and quarter galleries, as depicted on a Kuwaiti stamp.

- 1) *Passage through Primary Sources*: This may involve critical reading, study, translation or editing of original documents, some of them recently discovered and still in manuscript form. Our group works with languages ranging from Arabic, Persian and Tajik, to Urdu, Hindi and Gujarati. Several students in our group also work with European languages, including French, German and Russian. Your projects will be presented using Google documents, an online word processor that lets you create and format text documents, and collaborate with other people in real time.
- 2) *Sojourn with Scholarly Literature*: Oftentimes, this is like a reconnaissance mission, where students need to make deep forays into resources such as JSTOR and ProQuest. In examining the scholarly lay of the land, they gather together all existing literature on a subject, creating detailed annotated bibliographies so that we have a sense of what has already been accomplished in a field, and what remains to be done. You will use EndNote software to search online bibliographic databases, organize your references, images and PDFs in any language, and create bibliographies and figure lists instantly.
- 3) *Quest for Knowledge Mobilization*: One of the reasons why figures such as Ibn Battuta, Marco Polo and Nasir-i Khusraw are celebrated to this day is that they not only undertook unprecedented journeys, but that they were gifted communicators whose record of experiences spread far and wide. Our research team wishes to ensure that the findings of our projects are not left to gather dust in obscurity, but that they actually benefit a broader audience beyond the hallowed halls of academia. Students working with digital media,

websites, art, cartography, music and drama will help ensure that the fruits of our research may be enjoyed by the broadest spectrum of people possible.

## II. Philosophy of Learning

In his literary masterpiece, *The Face of Religion*, Hakim Nasir-i Khusraw extols the bounties of knowledge. To him, knowledge is the pearl of intellect. To attain knowledge and act in accordance with it is to enter paradise itself.

How does one attain knowledge? In a secular setting, over the last several decades, there has been a tremendous amount of research about the most effective methods of teaching and learning. This may be surprising to some. After all, research-inspired advances are clear in professions such as, for example, medicine or art, but in higher education?

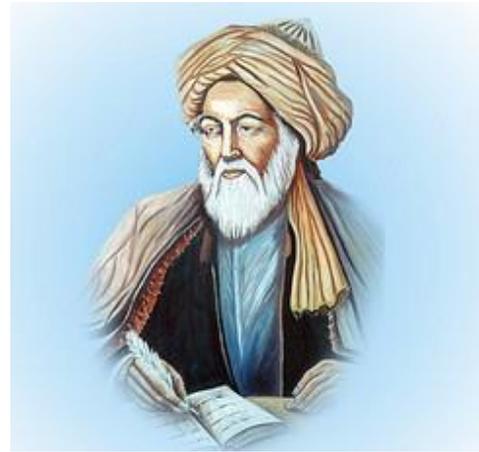


Figure 3: Artist's Impression of Hakim Nasir-i Khusraw

The following miniature depicts Henry of Germany delivering a lecture at the University of Bologna in Italy, sometime in the 1300s. Look familiar? The professor professes from the lectern, some students are keenly listening, some have their books open while others do not, two are happily chatting with one another, and at the end of the third row you'll notice at least one who is taking a nap during class! Some things never change, do they?



Figure 4: Henry of Germany Lecturing at the University of Bologna, Italy, in the 1300s

*A Journey in Muslim Civilizations* is a radically new type of online research course, which incorporates many of the latest advances in research about how we learn best. When done well, the lecture format can be effective, but it certainly has its limitations. You will find that in this class I'm much less the proverbial "sage-on-the-stage" than I am the "guide-by-your-side." Put differently, the students in this course are the ones on the stage, an orchestra as it were, and I'm the conductor, helping all of you to perform and to bring out the best in yourselves. When you're the ones playing the musical instruments, falling asleep is not an option!

A major step forward in understanding how all of us learn was taken in the mid-1970s with clinical studies conducted by Educational Psychologists Ference Marton and Roger Säljö. Their experiments revealed that we approach learning differently depending on what we perceive the objectives of a class to be. Essentially, the perceived objectives can lead us to become reproductive "surface" learners, simply regurgitating what we've been taught, or understanding "deep" learners, actively engaged in a search for meaning. A few decades before Marton and Säljö published their findings, a committee of educators chaired by Benjamin Bloom developed a classification of learning objectives in education, a classification that was updated in 2001 by Bloom's colleagues, Lorin Anderson and David Krathwahl. Learning outcomes were arranged hierarchically and ranged from basic outcomes such as "remembering" to more advanced outcomes such as "evaluating" and "creating." All of your projects involve the range of thinking skills, but focus on developing the higher ones. In designing this course, I have tempered the structure provided by Bloom and his associates with insights from L. Dee Fink who, writing in 2007, designed categories of learning that were influenced by Bloom's taxonomy, but which were interactive rather than hierarchical.

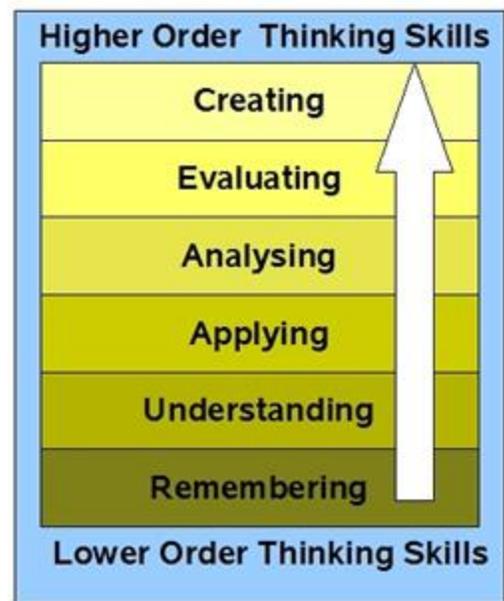


Figure 5: Bloom's Taxonomy (Revised)

As a service-learning course, an overarching goal of our class as a whole is to appreciate, understand, participate in and contribute to the concept of pluralism in a Muslim context. Our course's learning outcomes are conceived with this goal in mind. With such a variety of projects, students will complete their journeys having achieved a diverse range of learning outcomes. A detailed exposition of the Learning Outcomes of this course, and rubrics for the assessments of these outcomes by assignment type are available on our Blackboard site under Course Information.

### III. Assessment:

You read above that Nasir-i Khusraw, the eleventh-century Muslim sage and traveller, felt that the paradise itself could be entered by the combination of knowledge (*'ilm*) and action (*'amal*). This is not so unlike modern educational theory, which is placing more and more emphasis on "learning by doing." *A Journey in Muslim Civilizations* is very much a course based on experiential learning. In order for this type of learning to be effective, however, there must be an alignment between the learning outcomes, the course content, and the assessment procedures. In an article published in

*Educational Researcher*, Professor S. Alan Cohen explains that aligning objectives and assessment is so effective in improving learning, that it is “the magic bullet.” Detailed assessment rubrics for all aspects of our course are therefore provided on our website, and are closely modelled on the Structure of Observed Learning Outcome (SOLO) taxonomy developed by researcher John Biggs. Below is a brief outline of the various activities in which you will engage and a summary breakdown of how your progress will be assessed.

1. 15% Ongoing

*Research Travelogue*

Each member of our team has a *Research Travelogue*, or *Safarnama*, set up on Google+. Your *Travelogue* documents your intellectual journey. Like the *Travelogues* of others, it records where you have been, where you plan to go next, your thoughtful reflections about your journey, and the best way to arrive at your destination. Every day you work on your project, you should take a few minutes to record this information, along with the amount of time you spent and what was accomplished during that time. Every Tuesday, before 6:00 pm, you will write a summary *Travelogue* entry. In line with the University’s expectations, Summer students should show twenty hours of progress every week, while Fall-Winter students should complete ten hours per week. Records of time committed are submitted through the timekeeping tool which, of course, only records hours spent, not quality achieved. Details on the specific parameters for the *Travelogue* are provided separately.

2. 15% Ongoing

*The Cairo Café & The Delhi Darbar*

Many of you will be travelling in the presence of others who are working on similar projects. You must tap into and draw on their experiences, and also share your own expertise in order to be successful. The place to do this is the *Cairo Café* on Blackboard, where intractable translation problems are unravelled, successful search strategies are shared, and artistic ideas are discussed. All of you will participate in the *Delhi Darbar*, a splendid intellectual *levée* of our entire research team, in which we listen to, for example, grand, thought-provoking orations of some of the world’s greatest living thinkers, and discuss how these might be applied to our own research. Details on the specific parameters for the *Cairo Café* and the *Delhi Darbar* are provided separately.



Figure 6: An Arab Café

By Giuseppe Signorini (d. 1932), in pencil, watercolor, and gouache on paper

2. 40% Weekly

*Project(s) in Progress*

At the time you inscribe your summary *Travelogue* post on Tuesday, you must also dispatch the work you have completed over the course of the week. In response to both your *Travelogue* and your weekly submissions, the course instructors will provide you with frequent feedback and guidance. You will receive at least four messages per month in your journals to help you along. Over the first several weeks of the course, you will also complete “Navigating Your Travels,” an orientation that will expose you to the concepts and tools of Information Literacy that will assist you throughout your journey, and your academic career.

3. 30% Upon Completion of Journey

*Final Portfolio*

At the conclusion of this intellection journey, all students will submit a final, polished version of their research and a reflection on what they’ve accomplished. Details on the specific parameters for the final portfolio will be provided near the end of the term.

In our class, student researchers will be evaluated on the accuracy, organization, precision, speed, and imaginative quality of the work they produce. They will be assessed on their ability to follow guidelines and instructions, to take individual initiative in a responsible manner, to be creative, and to be enthusiastic team players who, if called upon, contribute to the projects being worked on by others in our virtual class community. They must be regular and punctual in reporting developments in their Google+ *Travelogues* and in submitting their work as it progresses.

#### IV. Honesty and Academic Integrity

While Marco Polo was no doubt one of the world’s greatest voyagers, his memory is besmirched because it seems that he (or perhaps the compiler of his tale, Rustichello da Pisa) clearly exaggerated the extent and details of his travels. *The Travels of Marco Polo* soon came to be known as *Il Milione*, the book of a million lies, so to speak, and he himself earned the unfortunate sobriquet of *Marco Milione*.



Figure 7: “Cannibalism,” is found on folio 74v in *Le Livre des merveilles de Marco Polo*, housed at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Département des manuscrits in Paris, where it is numbered Français 2810. Many scholars have questioned whether Marco Polo’s numerous accounts of cannibalism were true, or simply exaggerations to impress an incredulous audience.

Some modern scholars have even wondered whether he really visited China, as he claims he did. After all, how could he have visited and yet never mentioned some obvious novelties, like the fact that people ate with chopsticks? As in Aesop’s famous story of *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*, one falsehood can cast a shadow of doubt over everything a person says.

In a university context, as in life more generally, honesty and your personal integrity are worth a great deal. Do not exaggerate your accomplishments in your *Travelogue*; when you benefit from anyone's assistance, be sure to acknowledge this in a citation, and be meticulous in all forms of scholarly documentation. The university provides extensive assistance to help students maintain their academic integrity, and it would be helpful for you to consult the resources at the following URL:

<http://www.utoronto.ca/academicintegrity/resourcesforstudents.html>

## **V. Your Projects**

Students will be contacted individually before the beginning of the course with full details about their projects and any required textbooks or other course materials, which vary by project. Detailed instructions and examples of how to prepare *Travelogue* entries and how to structure the various types of projects encompassed by this course are available on Blackboard under Course Information.

***Welcome aboard - let the journey begin!***

Sources for images:

Figure 1

<http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/200004/the.longest.hajj.the.journeys.of.ibn.battuta.part.2-from.riches.to.rags.makkah.to.india.htm>

Figure 2

<http://www.shipstamps.co.uk/forum/viewtopic.php?f=2&t=10576&p=11114&hilit=kuwait#p11114>

Figure 3

<http://www.hujat.net/?tag=%D8%AD%DA%A9%DB%8C%D9%85-%D8%B4%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B3%DB%8C>

Figure 4

Miniature 1233 in MS Kupferstichkabinett SMPK, Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, as reproduced in Michael Olmert, *The Smithsonian Book of Books*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2003.

Figure 5

<http://hillerspires.wikispaces.com/Rubrics+and+Blooms+Taxonomy>

Figure 6

[http://www.christies.com/lotFinder/lot\\_details.aspx?intObjectID=4800744](http://www.christies.com/lotFinder/lot_details.aspx?intObjectID=4800744)

Figure 7

[http://cy.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delwedd:Marco\\_Polo-cannibalism.jpg](http://cy.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delwedd:Marco_Polo-cannibalism.jpg)