The Near East in the Age of Justinian and Muhammad (c.AD 500-700)

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What were the historical origins of Islam? How did armies loyal to Muhammad and his God manage to destroy the ancient empire of Persia and bring the Eastern Roman Empire of Byzantium to its knees in just twenty years? How did the first Islamic state consolidate its rule over the Near and Middle East by the end of the seventh century? These are among the core questions that students taking this paper will address.

The paper begins with the revival of superpower conflict between the East Roman Empire ruled from Constantinople and the ancient empire of Persia at the start of the sixth century. Initially approaching the Roman-Persian conflict through the eye-witness testimony of the contemporary Greek historian Procopius, students will examine how escalating rivalry led to a struggle for power between the Romans and Persians across the Near East and, crucially, Arabia, where it helped to create the cultural and political pre-conditions for the emergence of Islam, as well as the way in which the two empires reached out to the great nomad powers of Western and Central Eurasia in a desperate attempt to secure imperial superiority and advantage. In the second half of the paper, students focus on the emergence of Islam, consider the lively debate as to the nature of the religion in its formative phase and the role (and historicity) of the Prophet Muhammad, and study how the establishment of Islamic rule ushered in a new epoch in human history the ramifications of which are still with us.

The paper presupposes no knowledge of ancient or medieval history, and all original sources are studied in translation. In the past, many students have combined this paper with twentieth-century options, and those who have taken it have found it provides useful preparation for careers in diplomacy, international relations and government service as well as further research in Byzantine and Islamic studies.

The paper will be taught through seven one-on-one supervisions and there is no cap. Students may, if they wish, specialize more on Roman/Byzantine or Islamic
topics according to interest. Students must be comfortable, however, approaching the history of religion from a historical perspective.

A core bibliography of sources available in English translation will be provided and added to as new translations appear, and archaeological evidence will also feature.

**Core texts (2019):**


P. Bell *Three Political Voices From the Age of Justinian* (Liverpool, 2009)


*The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus* tr. M. Whitby (Liverpool, 2001)


*The History of Menander the Guardsman* tr. R.C. Blockley (Cambridge, 1985)


*The Seventh Century in the West Syrian Chronicles* tr. A. Palmer and S. Brock (Liverpool, 1993)

*Theophilius of Edessa’s Chronicle* tr. R. Hoyland (Liverpool, 2011)


*The Koran* (various translations available)

The following are key titles on which secondary reading will be based. Further reading lists, including articles, will be handed out in the package to be given to all
students taking this paper.

**Eastern Roman Empire**
P. Booth *Crisis of Empire: Doctrine and Dissent at the End of Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 2014)
P.R.L. Brown *The World of Late Antiquity* (London, 1971)
L. Brubaker and J. Haldon *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era* (Cambridge, 2010)
Averil Cameron *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity* (London, 2011)
M. Dal Santo *Debating the Saints’ Cult in the Age of Gregory the Great* (Oxford, 2012)
J.F. Haldon *Byzantium in the Seventh Century* (Cambridge, 1990)
M. Humphreys *Law, Power and Imperial Ideology in the Iconoclast Era* (Oxford, 2014)
A.H.M. Jones *The Later Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1964)
P. Sarris *Economy and Society in the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge, 2006)
P. Wood *We Have No King But Christ* (Oxford, 2010)

**Eastern Empire – Art**
M. Harrison *A Temple for Byzantium* (London, 1989)
J. Lowden *Early Christian and Byzantine Art* (London, 1997)
C. Mango *The Art of the Byzantine Empire* (Toronto, 1972)
C. Mango *Byzantine Architecture* (London, 1979)

**Historiography**
Averil Cameron *Procopius and the Sixth Century* (London, 1985)
M. Cook *Mohammad* (Oxford, 1983)
A.A. Duri *The Rise of Historical Writing Among the Arabs* (Princeton, 1983)
R.G. Hoyland *Seeing Islam As Others Saw It* (Princeton, 1997)
J.D. Howard-Johnston *Witnesses to a World Crisis* (Oxford, 2010)
E. Jeffreys, B. Croke and R. Scott (eds.) *Studies in John Malalas* (Sydney, 1990)
R. Macrides *History as Literature in Byzantium* (Woodbridge, 2010)
C.F. Robinson *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge, 2003)
Balkan History and the Steppe
F. Curta The Making of the Slavs – History and Archaeology of the Lower Danube Region c. 500–700 (Cambridge, 2001)
F. Curta The Edinburgh History of the Greeks c.500-1050 (Edinburgh, 2011)
M. Maas (ed.) The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Attila (Cambridge, 2014)
D. Obolensky The Byzantine Commonwealth (London, 1971)
D. Sinor (ed.) The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia (Cambridge, 1990)

International Relations and Sasanian Persia
R.C. Blockley East Roman Foreign Policy (Leeds, 1992)
M. Boyce The Zoroastrians – Their Religious Beliefs and Practices (London, 1979)
A. Cameron (ed.) The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East III – States, Resources and Armies (Princeton, 1993)
G. Fowden Empire to Commonwealth – Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity (Princeton, 1993)
G. Greatrex Rome and Persia at War (Leeds, 1998)
G. Herrmann The Iranian Revival (Oxford, 1977)
G.R.D. King and Averil Cameron (eds.) The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East III – Land- Use and Settlement Patterns (Princeton, 1994)
A.D. Lee Information and Frontiers (Cambridge, 1993)
R. Payne A State of Mixture: Christians, Zoroastrians and Iranian Political Culture in Late Antiquity (Berkeley, 2013)
P. Pourshariati The Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire (London, 2009)
T. Power The Red Sea From Byzantium to the Caliphate (New York, 2012)

Early Islam (see also ‘Historiography’ above)
F.M. Donner Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam (Cambridge Mass., 2010)
G. Fowden Before And After Muhammad – The First Millennium Refocused (Princeton, 2013)
R. Hillenbrand Islamic Art and Architecture (London, 1999)
R. Holyland Arabia and the Arabs from the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam (London, 2001)
R. Hoyland In God’s Path (Oxford, 2015)
H. Kennedy The Great Arab Conquests (London, 2007)
M.G. Morony Iraq After the Muslim Conquest (Princeton, 1984)
A. Neuwirth The Qur’an and Late Antiquity (Oxford, 2019)
C. Robinson Empires and Elites After the Muslim Conquests (Cambridge, 2000)
P. Sijpesteijn Shaping A Muslim State (Oxford, 2013)
Central Asia in Late Antiquity
N. de Cosmo and M. Maas (ed.) Empires and Exchanges in Eurasian Late Antiquity: Rome, China, Iran and the Steppe, ca 250-750 (Cambridge, 2018)
E. de la Vassière Sogdian Merchants (Leiden, 2005)
P. Golden An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples (Wiesbaden, 1992)
V. Hansen The Silk Road – A New Documentary History (Oxford, 2016)
H. J. Kim The Huns (London, 2013)
K. Rezakhani Re-Orienting The Sasanians (Edinburgh, 2017)
EXAMINATION  HISTORICAL TRIPOS PART II  (SPECIMEN)

THE NEAR EAST IN THE AGE OF JUSTINIAN AND MUHAMMAD, AD 527-700

Page 1

Answer at least one question from Section A and two other questions.

You may not start to read the questions printed on the subsequent pages of this question paper until instructed that you may do so by the Invigilator

[TURN OVER]
SECTION A

1 How do the writings of Procopius relate to the ‘political thought’ of his day?

2 How useful a source for cultural change in the sixth century is the Chronicle of John Malalas?

3 What does hagiography add to our understanding of early Byzantine society?

4 What can we know of the ‘historical Muhammad’?

5 How reliable is the early Islamic historical tradition with respect to the conquests?

SECTION B

6 Why did the restoration of Byzantine control over the Balkans falter in the sixth century?

7 What factors were primarily responsible for Roman-Persian warfare in the sixth century?

8 Why was the sixth century a period of such political volatility on the West Eurasian Steppe?

9 Why did Christian heresy proliferate in the sixth and seventh centuries?

10 Either (a) What role did Ethiopia play in the struggle for control of the Red Sea??

     Or   (b) What factors shaped cultural conditions in Arabia in the sixth century?

11 ‘The defeat of Khusro II owed more to the Turks than it did to Heraclius.’ Discuss.

12 What factors shaped the development of the concept of jihad?

13 When and how did the Muslims consolidate their rule over the Near East?
To what extent would it be fair to describe early Islamic art and architecture as ‘sub-Byzantine’?

Why did the Arabs fail to eliminate Byzantium in the seventh century?

When, and why, did Islam begin to oppose religious images?