

Marianna Shreve Simpson & Kelly Tuttle
M-85: Introduction to Islamicate Manuscripts
11–16 June, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Narrative Course Evaluations

1) *Were the pre-course reading assignments useful? Are there any readings that you would like to see added or removed in future years?*

1. {no response}
2. Yes, the readings were useful. I have a full-time non-academic job, so getting the readings even further in advance would have been even better (like as soon as I was accepted). It would have been good to receive perhaps some directed paleography practice at one of the free online sites in advance, too. I really appreciate the comprehensive reading and reference list provided digitally.
3. They were all very useful and I think complemented each other well. We did discuss Adam Gacek's *Vade Mecum* in the class—perhaps that might be a potential addition.
4. Yes, definitely. I felt like this course assigned an appropriate amount of reading to be useful for context without being totally overwhelming.
5. The readings were very useful and showed a diversity of perspectives.
6. All of the reading was helpful and the extended reading list was very thoughtful.

2) *What are your thoughts on the course workbook and/or other teaching materials distributed during class? Was the content appropriate and useful? Will it continue to be useful for you after the course?*

1. {no response}
2. Yes, it was great. I wish I had requested a printed copy for use in the reading room (laptops were not permitted), but I can print one out at home.
3. The workbook was not ever referred to by our instructors, but it was handy to have nearby at moments (although most people stopped bringing it along). For this reason, perhaps they could have made more specific reference to it when, e.g., discussing script types, colophons, binding types, and how to do a bibliographical description for an Islamicate manuscript.
4. Yes, I would strongly recommend that students bring a printed copy of the workbook to the course. It was helpful when looking at objects, especially during our "practicum" session on the final day.
5. Yes—I referred frequently to the workbook in class, in the evening, and in the days since.
6. I see myself continuing to refer to the workbook beyond the end of the course.

3) *Which aspects of the course were most intriguing and relevant for you as an individual? Did you walk away with any new insights, ideas, or project plans?*

1. {no response}
2. As always, the instructors were able and willing to go into detail regarding higher-level questions. Seeing a variety of manuscripts from across many different regions and centuries was very helpful as points of comparison. Many insights were directly applicable for revision of a book chapter in progress. I also am planning on collaborating with another course member who works at an institution in my region on an upcoming project or at least to help them catalog certain objects relative to our course.
3. The best part was being able to spend time with the wonderful collections at the Free Library and Penn, looking at them up close and devoting a good amount of time. The spirit of collaboration was lovely and lent some new insights from people trained in different areas.
4. Very much interested in the institutional and scribal cultures that surround manuscript production. Do not have any project plans at this time, unfortunately.
5. It was especially useful for me to get so many opportunities to study the subtleties of the scripts with examples in so many different hands. I also felt that I gained quite a bit of insight into how to identify and engage with different genres like Muslim devotional texts and Persian poetry.
6. I was blown away by how much information was packed into the course considering that the teachers had to cover most of the world (the Islamic world) and well over 1,000 years of manuscript history. RBS really needs more non-Western book courses.

4) *Did the instructors help you to acquire all the skills and information promised in the course description? Did you learn what you had hoped to learn?*

1. {no response}
2. Yes. A real sticking point is paleographical differences between regions and centuries, for which there are few practical resources in print or published online. I think a spin-off course of Paleography for Arabic Script would be much appreciated. I would take that course, 100%.
3. I did learn a lot. I loved the course's more freewheeling structure at times, since we were totally led by the manuscripts in front of us and that led to some great conversations, but there were moments where I might have appreciated more structure. For example, I had some trouble distinguishing between script styles, and a discussion of a handout or a more in-depth slide show with attention to particular letter forms unique to each script would have helped me. I also felt that some participants already had a solid understanding of bookbinding, but I would have appreciated a few minutes explaining

the terminology of folios/bifolia/quires &c. with some time devoted to diagrams, as I felt like my understanding of binding is still a little shaky.

4. The instructors were very welcoming and encouraging. I would have hoped to learn more about the manuscript production process itself, though, and less about design details. A few more lectures and a few fewer books would have been really helpful.
5. Yes, absolutely. I appreciated the complementary nature of the two instructors' perspectives, which allowed us to cover all the planned topics in such depth.
6. The instructors were incredible. Their different areas of expertise complemented each other and allowed the students to come to the materials from different perspectives.

5) *How do you plan to use the skills and knowledge acquired during your time here?*

1. {no response}
2. First, it clarified a few questions I had with respect to work I have in progress that will be published within a year. Second, it helped me tremendously to frame the development of the Islamicate book which will help me advise my students in their individual research. I estimate that 20-25 of my students will benefit from this information within the next academic year. Third, the connections I made in this course among the students and instructors will open up new venues for research and investigation among my students.
3. To help me write my dissertation, and potentially to apply to curatorial or cataloging jobs in future.
4. {no response}
5. This course has given me a whole vocabulary and foundational understanding for describing the materiality of Islamicate manuscripts. I feel far more equipped to study manuscripts from my institution's collection now.
6. I will be working with a specific collection of largely unprocessed materials in my library. This will allow me to better describe the materials we have to interested researchers.

6) *Who might benefit the most from taking this RBS course?*

1. {no response}
2. Everyone on this planet. But in particular, those who have been working with Islamicate sources in edited editions or mediated in some other way: there is nothing like handling the primary sources. The construction and presentation of the sources in their earlier iterations illustrate aspects of writerly and readerly culture that no mediated source can afford.
3. A professional at a collection housing Islamicate manuscripts without expertise in the area; someone hoping to research Islamicate manuscripts.
4. Students in Asian Studies or history of Islamic world, or librarians working on Islamic

manuscript holdings.

5. Special collections librarians, Near Eastern Studies librarians, grad students specializing in historical texts in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, &c.
6. Anyone who specializes in material culture and history from Spain to Southeast Asia. Our group was very diverse with grad students, postdocs, catalogers, reference librarians, and non-profit employees. It was fascinating to hear how everyone ended up in the course and what they hoped to gain by attending.

7) *If applicable, what were the most powerful, or otherwise noteworthy educational moments in the course? Were there any "aha!" moments you'd like to share?*

1. {no response}
2. I learned about an early fourteenth-century Mashriq cosmographer of whom I had never heard before. I learned that he used scientific sources from Al-Andalus alongside translated Greek natural history texts. This is pretty interesting, as the common narrative is that natural philosophy produced in the Western part of the Islamic empire in these times was disregarded or at least downplayed by the sovereignties in the Eastern parts. I will be looking into this more in the future!
3. Seeing the back of a hamzanama loose leaf. Seeing the wonderful unbound manuscripts with a carry case from North Africa. Comparing lots of different dalail and Ottoman qur'ans side-by-side. The herbals.
4. {no response}
5. Because we occasionally looked at a folio or codex that we had already seen on a previous day of the course, I was really able to measure my leaps in understanding as I would be able to notice and appreciate the rubrications better or the way that illustrations were incorporated into the text.
6. {no response}

8) *Are there any other ways in which the course could have been improved?*

1. {no response}
2. I would have liked to have received a digital handlist of manuscripts we looked at with links to their digital components. We went through so many books, it will be hard to piece them back together in the order in which they were viewed. But I tried to write down as many shelfmarks as I had time to for future research.
3. Our time sometimes felt unstructured because it was unclear who was in charge in the team-teaching scenario; perhaps each session could be assigned to one instructor.
4. {no response}
5. {no response}
6. If anything, a third teacher who feels comfortable talking about South and Southeast Asian Islamic manuscripts.

9) *Do you feel that you got your money's worth? How likely are you to recommend this course to others? On a 1–10 scale, 1 would indicate that you disagree that you got your money's worth, 5 would indicate a neutral response, and 10 would indicate that you agree that you got your money's worth.*

1. 10
2. 10
3. 7
4. 8
5. 10
6. 10

10) *If your course made any (virtual) field trips outside of the classroom or had guest speakers, do you feel that they enhance the course experience?*

1. {no response}
2. Traveling between Logan Square and Penn was a little challenging during rush hour when you are not familiar with the city's transit options. I sort of wish they were all in one location the whole week for ease of routine. But that could just be me getting old. I appreciated being in both facilities, nonetheless.
3. {no response}
4. {no response}
5. The Free Library staff really did a wonderful job welcoming us and introducing us to other aspects of the library and the special collections during the breaks.
6. N/A

11) *Do you have any additional thoughts or advice for anyone considering taking this course in a future year?*

1. {no response}
2. Review the names of the Islamic months! Those become relevant in colophons. Familiarize yourself with the Persian and Indian epic poems if you are more accustomed to Arabic literary history (and vice versa).
3. {no response}
4. {no response}
5. {no response}
6. {no response}

12) *If you had to sum up your RBS experience with a single sentence, phrase, or a haiku, what would you say?*

1. {no response}
2. Elegant simurgh / tail feathers, breaking through / text frame: Majesty!
3. What a pleasure to be around book nerds and learn from them!
4. {no response}
5. {no response}
6. {no response}