

Islam in Asia: Visual and Material Culture (A006633)

Course size *(nominal values; actual values may depend on programme)*

Credits 5.0 **Study time 150 h**

Course offerings in academic year 2026-2027

A (semester 2) English Gent

Lecturers in academic year 2026-2027

De Clercq, Eva	LW21	lecturer-in-charge
Mondini, Sara	LW21	co-lecturer

Offered in the following programmes in 2026-2027

	crdts	offering
Bachelor of Arts in Oriental Languages and Cultures(main subject Arabic and Islamic Studies)	5	A
Bachelor of Arts in Oriental Languages and Cultures(main subject China (China Track))	5	A
Bachelor of Arts in Oriental Languages and Cultures(main subject China (UGent Track))	5	A
Bachelor of Arts in Oriental Languages and Cultures(main subject India)	5	A
Bachelor of Arts in History	5	A
Exchange Programme Art Studies	5	A
Exchange Programme Oriental Languages and Cultures	5	A
Elective Set Culture and Society	5	A

Teaching languages

English

Keywords

Islam, Culture, Material and Visual Culture, Art and Architecture, Decolonization, Religion, Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, Indian Ocean, Silk Road.

Position of the course

The course provides an exhaustive introduction to the Islamic culture in Asia and to the role of different productions in the process of identity-building of Muslim communities in the region. Grounding on the centrality of cultural, visual and material productions, it aims to investigate social, political, religious and historical dynamics through a decolonial lens, insisting on the crucial contacts and exchanges within the macro region and with 'the West'.

Contents

Although Islam and Islamic culture are often exclusively associated with the Middle and Near East, the vast majority of Muslims today live in the Asia-Pacific region. The course aims to introduce students to the Islamic communities of Asia, approached and analysed through the lens of their cultural, visual and material productions. These productions will be discussed in relation to the historical, political, religious and social contexts in which they were produced and they will become a way for discussing given societies, political perspectives, common perceptions and the role they have - and had - in the communities' processes of identity building.

The series of lectures will cover the broad geographical area mainly focusing on modern, early modern and pre-modern productions, on their conservation/valorisation/destruction, on trends and perceptions, dismantling

cliches and dealing with the frequent tensions between Islamic prescriptions and practices. This will inevitably lead to discussing and examining traditions, prescriptions, interpretations whose roots are to be found in centuries of formation, diffusion and development of Islam and to the age of colonialism.

Moving away from the Arabian Peninsula and the Middle Eastern region, one of the main objectives of the course is to question the myth of center and periphery in the Islamic world, attempting to redefine the complex dynamics of exchange and contact across Islamic societies, geography and history, and to focus on the regional diversity of lived Islam in this macro-region. The objective is to re-frame and decolonise the approach to the "Islamic culture" by recognising Islam as a global phenomenon, but understanding the heterogeneity of its culture.

The modern and contemporary conflicts around Islam in Asia and in the West will also emerge, as will the debates about the place of Islam in public life and in modern governments - alongside transregional Islamist movements. Students will examine the role of culture, but also of nationality, ethnicity, gender, in the study of diverse Muslim communities in Asia.

The course will adopt a thematic approach and will analyse a series of case studies significant to understand the complexity of the Asian region. Occasionally, lectures will be given by eminent scholars.

Initial competences

The course does not require specific competences, the necessary background for the comprehension of the proposed analysis will be provided.

The courses below can be considered complementary and/or preparatory to the course (but not essential):

Introduction to the History of Islamic West Asia (600-1800)

Introduction to Islam and Being Muslim

History of South Asia

Final competences

- 1 To understand and describe cultural and artistic dynamics, movements and tendencies discussed from the Asian region and the underpinning ideologies;
- 2 To recognise and analyse the cultural, visual and material productions within their historical and political context by taking into account their role in the identity-building processes;
- 3 To reflect on the political, social and religious implications of movements, tendencies and development as of the conservation/valorisation policies of governments;
- 4 To comprehend the importance of the cultural productions for the study of societies and historical periods, and deepen issues and themes in relation to the knowledges acquired;
- 5 To critically approach the theories formulated by scholars and engage with key academic issues and debates.

Conditions for credit contract

Access to this course unit via a credit contract is unrestricted: the student takes into consideration the conditions mentioned in 'Starting Competences'

Conditions for exam contract

This course unit cannot be taken via an exam contract

Teaching methods

Group work, Seminar, Lecture, Independent work

Extra information on the teaching methods

Lectures (2 hours per week)

Lectures and eventual contributions by eminent scholars, videos and other media.

The course will adopt a thematic approach and through the analysis of cultural and artistic productions, discussions and a critical approach will be encouraged.

Students are expected to prepare for lectures and actively participate to the debate in class.

Individual study and independent work

Students will have to study the materials provided, prepare the readings assigned and write the essay. Students will also be asked to weekly prepare and formulate relevant question for the lectures.

Group work (1 hour per week)

Each week, a small group of students will give a 15-minute presentation about a topic agreed with the professor, which will be followed by and will foment the classroom discussion.

No class recordings will be made.

Study material

Type: Slides

Name: Powerpoint presentations

Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty

Optional: no

Available on Ufora : Yes

References

- Ahmed, Hilal, *Muslim political discourse in postcolonial India: Monuments, memory, contestation*, London: Routledge, 2015.
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- Aydin, Cemil, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought*, New York Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2007.
- Belting, Hans, *Florence and Baghdad*, London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011.
- Blair, Sheila S., and Jonathan M. Bloom, "The mirage of Islamic art: Reflections on the study of an unwieldy field," *The Art Bulletin* 85.1 (2003): 152-184.
- Elverskog, Johan, *Buddhism and Islam on the silk road*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania press, 2011.
- Federspiel, Howard M., *Sultans, shamans, and saints: Islam and Muslims in Southeast Asia*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007.
- Flood, Finbarr Barry, *Piety and Politics in the Early Indian Mosque*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Flood, Finbarr Barry, *Objects of translation: Material culture and medieval "Hindu-Muslim" encounter*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.
- Flood, Finbarr Barry, and Gülru Necipoğlu, *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2017.
- Sanaz Fotouhi and Esmail Zeiny (eds.), *Seen and Unseen: Visual Cultures of Imperialism*, Leiden: Brill, 2017.
- Grabar, Oleg, *The formation of Islamic art: revised and enlarged edition*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987.
- Gruber, Christiane J., and Avinoam Shalem (eds.), *The image of the Prophet between ideal and ideology: A scholarly investigation*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2014.
- Hughes, Aaron W., *Theorizing Islam: Disciplinary deconstruction and reconstruction*, London: Routledge, 2014.
- Jay, Martin, and Sumathi Ramaswamy (eds.), *Empires of Vision: A Reader*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.
- Kadoi, Yuka, *Islamic Chinoiserie: The Art of Mongol Iran*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019.
- Kooria, Mahmood, and Michael Naylor Pearson (eds.), *Malabar in the Indian Ocean: Cosmopolitanism in a maritime historical region*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Kumar, Sunil (ed.), *Demolishing Myths or Mosques and Temples? Readings on History and Temple Desecration in Medieval India*, Gurgaon: Three Essays Press, 2008.
- Laffan, Michael, *The makings of Indonesian Islam: Orientalism and the narration of a Sufi past*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011.
- Norton-Wright, Jenny, *Curating Islamic Art Worldwide. From Malacca to Manchester*, New York: Springer International Publishing, 2020.
- Öztürk, Onur, Xenia Gazi, and Sam Bowker (eds.), *Deconstructing the Myths of Islamic Art*, London: Routledge, 2022.
- Peacock, Andrew CS, and Richard Piran McClary (eds.), *Turkish History and Culture in India: Identity, Art and Transregional Connections*, Leiden: Brill, 2020.
- Prange, Sebastian R., *Monsoon Islam: trade and faith on the medieval Malabar*

Coast, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

- Said, Edward W., Orientalism, London: Penguin 2003, 19781.

- Shalem, Avinoam, "What do we mean when we say Islamic Art? An Urgent Plea for a Critical Re-Writing of the History of the Arts of the Islam," Journal of Art Historiography 6 (2012): 1-18.

- Shaw, Wendy MK, What is "Islamic" art?: Between religion and perception, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

- Weintraub, Andrew N. (ed.), Islam and popular culture in Indonesia and Malaysia, London: Routledge, 2011.

Course content-related study coaching

Upon appointment (face-to-face or on MS Teams) or by email.

Assessment moments

end-of-term and continuous assessment

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the first examination period

Oral assessment

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the second examination period

Oral assessment

Examination methods in case of permanent assessment

Assignment

Possibilities of retake in case of permanent assessment

not applicable

Extra information on the examination methods

A written assessment (1.500 word) (essay): an essay on a topic agreed with the professor and which explores one of the topics discussed during the lectures, or a topic related in some way to the course contents, to be submitted before the oral examination (before the start of the exam period). The professor is available to provide guidance and any necessary in-depth studies.

A 15-minute presentation: a short composition on a theme agreed with the professor and which deepens one of the productions or themes discussed during the lessons to be presented to the class.

Assessment will be by means of the assigned works and of a final oral examination (4/5 questions) on the approached themes; great importance will be given to the students' attendance and active participation to lessons and discussions.

The acquired knowledge, the appropriate use of technical vocabulary, the ability to critically approach the proposed readings and themes and bring them in relation to the acquired knowledges will be assessed during the final examination.

Calculation of the examination mark

Active participation (for those attending) and presentation 20 %

Essay: 30%

Oral examination: 50 %

Facilities for Working Students

Possible exemption from attendance (to be discussed with the teacher; specific readings will be assigned instead).

Possible alternative examination on a different time (in the same academic year).

Alternative time for feedback upon appointment (face-to-face or on MS teams).

For more information concerning flexible learning: contact the monitoring service of the faculty of Arts and philosophy.