

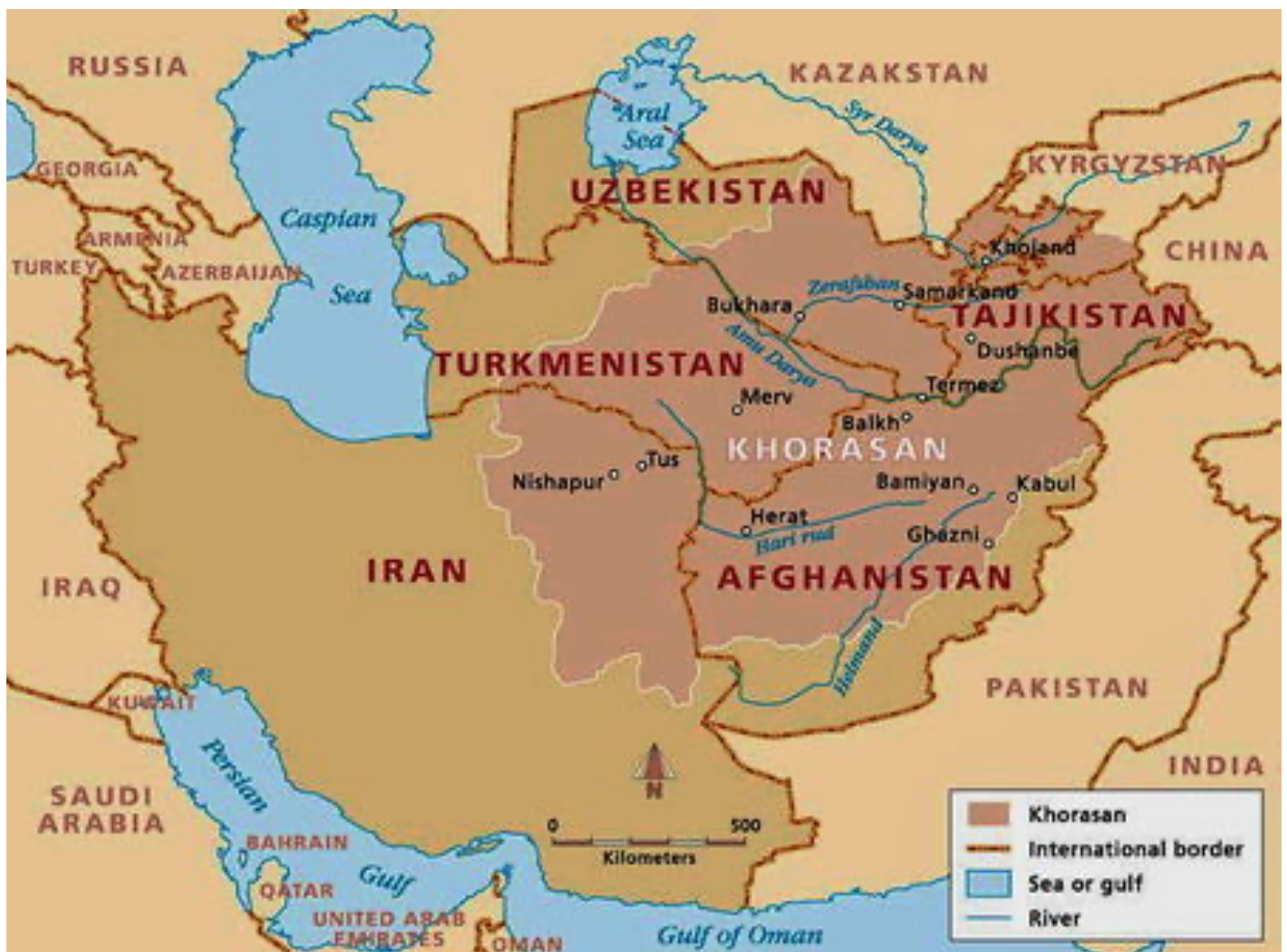
Lifelong Learning Collaborative

Lost Enlightenment: Central Asia's Golden Age

Fridays, 1:00 – 3:00 PM on Zoom

Spring 2023 Syllabus

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Ancient Khorasan cities shown with modern state borders.

Lost Enlightenment: Central Asia's Golden Age

Introduction

This course is based on the historian S. Frederick Starr's *Lost Enlightenment: Central Asia's Golden Age from The Arab Conquest to Tamerlane*.

What is called the Islamic Golden Age refers to an era of scholarly, literary, medical and scientific achievement by Islamic intellectuals in the regions stretching from Andalusia, across North Africa, into the larger Middle East and then to Persia, Turkey and Central Asia as far as the borders of the Chinese Empire.

Starr's major premise is that the Islamic Golden Age was very much a *Central Asian Golden Age*, in that a very substantial part of the legacy of that era is owing to work created by individuals whose origins and early successes occurred in the region from eastern Iran to modern Kyrgyzstan and from Bukhara and Tabriz in the north to Merv and Balkh in the south.

Persian was the lingua franca of the region after 1,000 years of dominance by Persian imperial regimes. Many scholars remained in their home regions, but many other individuals were drawn to Baghdad by circumstances such as civil war or hostile local leaders in some cases. Others went for the patronage and opportunity found in Baghdad and other Arab cities. They may have learned to speak and write Arabic, but they originated in Iran or from Iranian-influenced cultures.

Starr's is a possibly controversial premise to Arab readers, and that is reflective of the rivalry between the Persian and Arab worlds that has existed not only in international politics but in the cultural sphere from the time of the conquests to the present day -- starting with the Arabs' near-eradication of Persia's Zoroastrianism and continuing with the later Persian adoption of Shia Islam.

Prior to the Arab conquests, this region had for more than a thousand years been under Persian hegemony most of the time, interrupted only by Alexander's conquests. The long Persian intellectual tradition strongly influenced the Central Asian peoples and their leaders. In addition, the region was a multicultural melting pot, with many distinctive cities that had their own long traditions of achievement.

Starr makes persuasive arguments based on solid scholarship, and that is why this course is based on his work.

Unless otherwise noted, all required readings below are from "Lost Enlightenment."

See the Bibliography on pages below, following the Syllabus.

Weekly Reading Assignments

Class 1 March 25

Central Asia is a vast but ill-defined territory. For our purposes it is comprised mostly of the area called Khorasan in the map above. Even Khorasan is an ambiguous term which has encompassed different areas in different centuries. It is also an area that is and has always been home to many cultures and ethnicities: Iranians, Afghans, Uzbeks, Kazaks, Turks, as well as Buddhists, Hindus, Zoroastrians, Nestorian Christians and even Greeks, Romans, and Jews. (Persian emperors transported defeated Roman soldiers to the east as slaves, and many of Alexander commanders were left behind to rule Greek city states that he founded– such as Kandahar!)

Essential Reading:

*Starr, Preface and Chapters 1 and 2: The Center of The World, and
Worldly Urbanists, Ancient Land pp 1-61*

Starr Map Of Central Asia Cities PDF
Greater Iran Map - Modern Era PDF

*The Nestorians: A Forgotten Link In The Transfer Of Greek Science
To The West 10 pp PDF*

By Frances Luttikhuisen

https://www.academia.edu/12126231/The_Nestorians_A_Forgotten_Link_in_the_Transfer_of_Greek_Science_to_the_West

Further Reading (Optional):

See Wikipedia's *History of Central Asia*

First Hour Presentation: Introductions and Presentations

Second Hour Presentation: Foundations of the Golden Age

Class 2 March 31

The cultural and intellectual heritage of Central Asia prior to the Arab conquests begun in 651 CE was rich and varied. Zoroastrianism was founded in northeastern Iran at least a thousand years earlier. Trade with Hindu cities to the south was common, and Buddhist communities were found in many cities. Nestorian Christians brought the knowledge of ancient Greek thinkers. Chinese travelers, soldiers and merchants came and went. Iranian-trained astronomers and physicians in Central Asia came from a long lineage reaching back hundreds of years.

Class 2 (cont.)

Essential Reading:

Starr, Chapter 3: *A Cauldron of Skills, Ideas, And Faiths*, pp 62-100

Further Reading (Optional):

See Wikipedia entries for Zoroastrianism, Manicheanism, Nestorian Christianity

***The Physicians of Jundishapur* 16 pp PDF**

By Gail Marlow Taylor

<https://cpb-us-e2.wpmucdn.com/sites.uci.edu/dist/c/347/files/2020/01/e-sasanika-GP1-Taylor.pdf>

This makes clear that large numbers of scholars from several origins made Jundishapur what it was. Scholars from the Academy of Athens, from Urfa/ Edessa, from Antioch. Even from India, as well as Greek-speaking syriac Christians from Mesopotamia. Texts were in Persian, Sanskrit, Greek and Latin before being translated to Arabic. The debt to Persian intellectual traditions seems to be understated. As many as 5,000 students were at Jundishapur at one time.

First Hour Presentation: The Religions of Central Asia

Second Hour Presentation: The Persian Translations of the Greeks



**Settled by Iranians as early as 1500 BCE, the city of Balkh
-- like Merv - was destroyed by Genghis Khan's armies in 1220 CE**

Class 3 April 7



Persia's Sassanian Empire included much of Central Asia as well as Mesopotamia. After the initial Arab conquest in 651, taking control of the rest of Central Asia took more than 100 years, and widespread adoption of Islam and of the Arabic language took much longer. Widespread rebellions against Arab rule occurred from time to time, and various Central Asian cities maintained a great deal of independence from the Caliphate in Baghdad.

Essential Reading:

Starr, Chapter 4: How Arabs Conquered Central Asia and Central Asia, Then Set The Stage To Conquer Baghdad pp 101-125

Further Reading (Optional):

See Wikipedia entries for Balkh, Merv, Bukhara and Samarkand

See Wikipedia entry for Astronomy in the medieval Islamic world

First Hour Presentation:

Balkh, Merv, Bukhara and Samarkand

Second Hour Presentation:

Astronomers of Khurasan: al-Farghani, al-Khazini and al-Khojandi

Class 4 April 14

When Harun Rashid, and later Al-Mamun, sought to promote higher learning in Baghdad, each Caliph relied greatly on Persian-speaking administrators and scholars from Central Asia. The Barmakids, originally from Balkh, were political administrators and patrons of the sciences, which greatly helped the propagation of Iranian science and scholarship into the Islamic world of Baghdad and beyond. The Banū Mūsā brothers were three important ninth-century Persian scholars who lived and worked in Baghdad under Al-Mamun.

Essential Reading:

Starr, Chapter 5: East Wind Over Baghdad pp 126-155

See Wikipedia entries for Barmakids and for Banu Musa

Further Reading (Optional):

See Wikipedia entries for Harun Rashid and for Al-Mamun

Barmakids Encyclopaedia Iranica 4 pp PDF

<https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/barmakids><https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/barmakids>

Banu Musa Brothers

https://mathshistory.st-andrews.ac.uk/Biographies/Banu_Musa/

First Hour Presentation: The Barmak Family

Second Hour Presentation: The Banu Musa Brothers

Class 5 April 21

Essential Reading:

Starr, Chapter 6: Wandering Scholars, pp 156-193

See Wikipedia entries for
and

Jabir ibn Ḥayyān
Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi

First Hour Presentation: Jabir ibn Ḥayyān (aka Geber), “Father of Chemistry”

Second Hour Presentation: al-Khwārizmī, “Father of Algebra”

Class 6 April 28

Essential Reading:

Starr, Chapter 7: *Khurasan: Central Asia's Rising Star*, pp 194-224

***Obsessional Disorders in al-Balkhi's 9th century treatise: Sustenance of the Body and Soul* 5 pp PDF**

by Rania Awaad and Sara Ali

[https://www.academia.edu/87880276/Obsessional Disorders in al Balkhi_s_9th_century_treatise_Sustenance_of_the_Body_and_Soul](https://www.academia.edu/87880276/Obsessional_Disorders_in_al_Balkhi_s_9th_century_treatise_Sustenance_of_the_Body_and_Soul)

Further Reading (Optional):

***Ibn al-Rawandi Philosophy* 5 pp PDF**

<https://en-academic.com/dic.nsf/enwiki/1124905>

Why the Jewish freethinker Hiwi al-Balkhi criticised the Bible

From *Aeon Essays* 8 pp PDF

<https://aeon.co/essays/why-the-jewish-freethinker-iwi-al-balkhi-criticised-the-bible>

***Abu Bakr al-Razi* 15 pp PDF**

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/abu-bakr-al-razi/>

***Irānšahri* 3 pp PDF**

From *Encyclopaedia Iranica*

<https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/iransahri-abul-abbas-mohammad-b-mohammad>

First Hour Presentation: Psychology and Abu Zayd al-Balkhi

Second Hour Presentation: Freethinkers of Nishapur: Hiwi al-Balkhi, al-Rawandi. al-Razi and Iranshari (also given as Iransahri)

Class 7 May 5

Essential Reading:

Starr, Chapter 8: *A Flowering Of Central Asia: The Samanid Dynasty*, pp 225-266

Further Reading (Optional):

***Al-Tabari* Wikipedia profile 8 pp PDF**

Class 7 (cont.)

The Story of Rabia Balkhi, Afghanistan's Most Famous Female Poet 8 pp PDF

By Ajam Media Collective

<https://ajammc.com/2021/08/16/rabia-balkhi-afghanistan-poet/>

First Hour Presentation: al-Tabari and His *History of the Prophets and Kings*

Second Hour Presentation: Poets: *Rudaki (also Rodaki) and Rabia al-Balkhi*

Class 8 May 12

Essential Reading:

Starr, Chapter 9: *A Moment In The Desert*, pp 267-302

Further Reading (Optional):

Ibn Sina's 'Canon of Medicine' - A medical reference in Europe for 500 Years

Video: Youtube 2:09

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FsnjHV-Xuys>

Ibn Sina (Avicenna) Historical vignette 4 pp PDF

By Asita S. Sarrafzadeh, M.D., Nuri Sarafian, Ph.D., Almut Von Gladiss, Ph.D., Andreas W. Unterberg, M.D., Ph.D., And Wolfgang R. Lanksch, M.D., Ph.D.

<https://europepmc.org/article/MED/16602678>

The Arab Galen: Abu Bakr Zakariya Al-Razi (854 925) 19 pp PDF

By Zakaria Virk

This longish essay will be especially of interest to anyone interested in the history of medicine, as it profiles the wide scope of his medical knowledge 1100 years ago – which was relied on in the West for hundreds of years.

Ibn Sina (Avicenna) As A Psychiatrist: A View From Today's Perspective

9 pp PDF

By Ahmed Pajević 1, Izet Pajević, Miro Jakovljević, Mevludin Hasanović, Nermina Kravić, Nera Žigić

Faculty of Medicine, University in Tuzla, Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzeg

https://www.psychiatria-danubina.com/UserDocsImages/pdf/dnb_vol33_noSuppl%204/dnb_vol33_noSuppl%204_1218.pdf

First Hour Presentation: Biruni

Second Hour Presentation: ibn Sina and al-Razi

Class 9 May 19

Turks were at most a minor presence when the Arabs conquered Khorasan in 651. As centuries went by, Turks migrated into the region in increasing numbers, eventually controlling many cities and states. Turks' conversion to Islam facilitated their access power. Higher levels of education and intellectual life also changed Turkish culture. The work of al Khasgari exemplifies this trend. When the Seljuk Turks established their empire, one of their chief officials was the Persian Nizam al-Mulk, whose *The Book Of Government Or Rules For Kings* was influential for centuries. He also founded the Nizamiyyah institutes, which were among the first well organized institutions of higher learning in the Muslim world.

Essential Reading:

Starr, Chapter 10: Turks Take The Stage, pp 303-331

Siyasatnama Wikipedia 2 pp PDF

Nezamiyeh Wikipedia 2 pp PDF

About The Work And Map Of Mahmud Al-Kashgari 3 pp PDF

By Semra Alyilmaz And Harun Şahin

https://Www.Academia.Edu/44863891/About_The_Work_And_Map_Of_Mahmud_Al_Kashgari

First Hour Presentation: Al Khashgari and the Rise of the Turks

Second Hour Presentation: Nizam al-Mulk, the *Book of Politics and the Nezamiyeh*



The Seljuk Empire was founded in 1037 by Tughril (990–1063) and his brother Chaghri (989–1060), both of whom co-ruled over its territories. From their homelands near the Aral Sea, the Seljuks advanced first into Khorasan and into the Iranian mainland, where they would become largely based as a Persianate society.

Class 10 May 26

For lack of time, our course ends at the year 1200, when other forces such as strict conservative theology also cast a dark cloud over one Islamic region after another. The Mongol conquests inflicted total destruction on many Muslim cities and drastically disrupted Central Asian civilization. The most enlightened era of Islamic culture was fading just as a new era of art and literature began in Europe with writers such as Petrarch, Dante and Chaucer.

Starr's book continues the story of Enlightenment into the periods after the Mongol and Timurid conquests. (It is also true that both the Mongols and Timurids, once in power, subsequently sponsored great artistic and architectural achievement, much of which survives to this day.)

Essential Reading:

Starr, Chapters 11, 12: *Culture Under A Turkic Marauder, and Tremors Under The Dome Of Seljuk Rule*

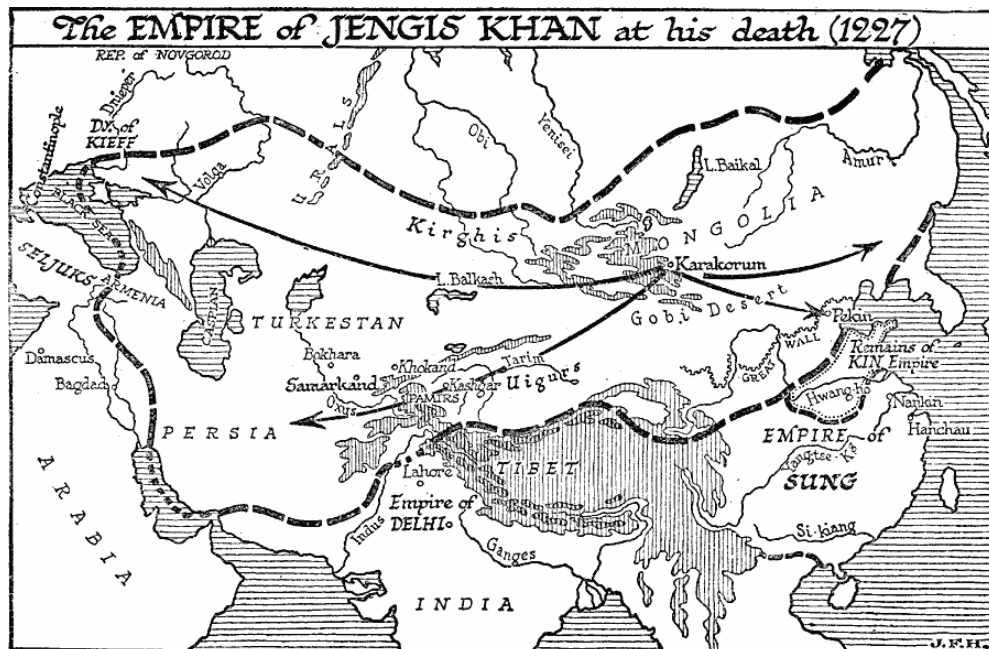
Further Reading:

See Wikipedia entries for Ferdowsi and Khayyam

Starr, Chapters 13, 14 and 15 are optional readings

First Hour Presentation: Ferdowsi and the Shahnameh

Second Hour Presentation: Omar Khayyam, Poet and Mathematician



In 1227 the conquests of Genghis Khan included all Central Asia and much of China.

Weekly Presentation Schedule
Volunteers needed for sessions in yellow

Class	Date	First Hour	Second Hour
1	3/24/23	Introductions and Presentations: Bob Martin	Foundations of the Golden Age: Bob Martin
2	3/31/23	The Religions of Central Asia:	Persian Translations of the Greeks:
3	4/7/23	Balkh, Merv, Bukhara and Samarkand: :	Al-Farghani, al- Khāzini and al-Khojandi:
4	4/14/23	The Barmak Family:	The Banu Musa Brothers:
5	4/21/23	Jabir ibn Ḥayyān (aka Geber), “Father of Chemistry”:	Al-Khwārizmī, “Father of Algebra”:
6	4/28/22	Psychology and Abu Zayd al-Balkhi :	Freethinkers: Hiwi al-Balkhi, al-Rawandi. al-Razi and Iranshari :
7	5/5/23	al-Tabari and His History of the Prophets and Kings:	Poets: Rudaki (also Rodaki) and Rabia al-Balkhi:
8	5/12/23	Biruni:	ibn Sina (Avicenna) and al-Razi:
9	5/19/23	Al Khashgari and the Rise of the Turks:	Nizam al-Mulk, the Book of Politics and the Nezamiyeh:
10	5/26/23	Ferdowsi and the Shahnameh:	Omar Khayyam, Poet and Mathematician:

Golden Age Bibliography

Books

Lost Enlightenment: Central Asia's Golden Age from the Arab Conquest to Tamerlane

By [S. Frederick Starr](#)

History of civilizations of Central Asia, v. 4: The Age of achievement, A.D. 750 to the end of the fifteenth century; Pt. I: the historical, social and economic setting 569 pp

UNESCO

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000104612>

A great compendium of information about many topics.

The History and Achievements of the Islamic Golden Age 228 pp PDF

By Lecturer Eamonn Gearon

The Great Courses: Course Guidebook

https://www.academia.edu/42082532/History_Topic_Civilization_and_Culture_Subtopic_Professorial_Lecturer_Eamonn_Gearon_The_History_and_Achievements_of_the_Islamic_Golden_Age_Course_Guidebook

This is an abbreviated version of the course's lectures, but a very good guide to many topics pertaining to Central Asian scholars.

The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism

Edited by

Michael Stausberg and Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina

https://www.academia.edu/12962751/The_Wiley_Blackwell_Companion_to_Zoroastrianism_TOC

The Cambridge History Of Iran In Eight Volumes 711 pp

Volume 4 Iran under the 'Abbasids

https://www.academia.edu/27263963/Busse_Iran_under_the_buyids_the_Cambridge_history_of_Iran

In addition to a military and political history, this volume includes extended chapters on many topics such as mathematics, cosmology, medicine, literature and philosophy.

Golden Age of Islamic Medicine - How Greek Science Passed to the Arabs 196 pp

By De Lacy O'Leary

<http://www.aina.org/books/hgsptta.htm#ch11>

Love Is My Savior: The Arabic Poems of Rumi

by [Rumi](#) (Author)

translated by [Nesreen Akhtarkhavari](#) and [Anthony A. Lee](#)

Available from Amazon

The Book of Government, or Rules For Kings, or Siyasatnameh

By Nizam Al Mulk By Nizām Al Mulk

<https://archive.org/details/the-book-of-government-or-rules-for-kings-the-siyar-al-muluk-or-siyasat-nama>

Articles and Documents

This is a sampling of the vast literature on this subject on the Web.

The contribution of Muslims to science during the Middle Abbasid Period (750-945) 19 pp

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/277777030_The_Contribution_of_Muslims_to_Science_during_the_Middle_Abbasid_Period_750-945_Journal_of_Revelation_and_Science_Vol_01_NO_01_2011_pp_39-56

Why the Arabic World Turned Away from Science

13 pp

The New Atlantis

<http://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/why-the-arabic-world-turned-away-from-science>

The Jundishapur School: Its History, Structure, and Functions

By Mehmet Mahfuz Söylemez

https://www.academia.edu/14579207/The_Jundishapur_School_Its_History_Structure_and_Functions

Psychology in medieval Islam Wikipedia 5 pp

Can Man Assess God's Goodness?

A Controversy Between Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 925) and Mu'tazilī theologians

By Philippe Vallat

https://www.academia.edu/7434218/Can_Man_assess_God_s_goodness_A_Controversy_Between_Ab%C5%AB_Bakr_al_R%C4%81z%C4%AB_and_Mu_tazil%C4%AB_Theologians_MIDEO_31_2016

Lists of Scholars

There is duplication in the lists below but each list has its own advantages and many individuals who might not appear on another list. Other such lists exist on the Web.

Muslim Scholars and Scientists

139 pp

Edited by Dr W. Hazmy C.H. Dr Zainurashid Z. Dr Hussaini R.

Islamic Medical Association of Malaysia N. Sembilan

A very useful list with biographical sketches of dozens of important Islamic intellectuals born from 701 to 1359, identifying their specialities.

<https://vdocument.in/download/muslim-scholars-and-scientists>

List of scientists in medieval Islamic world

PDF

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_scientists_in_medieval_Islamic_world

Another valuable resource

List of pre-modern Arab scientists and scholars

PDF

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_pre-modern_Arab_scientists_and_scholars

Another valuable resource

List of Islamic scholars described as father or founder of a field

PDF

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Islamic_scholars_described_as_father_or_founder_of_a_field

Timeline of science and engineering in the Muslim world

PDF

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_science_and_engineering_in_the_Muslim_world

Ancient Islamic mathematics - Biographies

<https://mathshistory.st-andrews.ac.uk/Biographies/category-arabs/>

Other Important Websites

Bibliographia Iranica

<https://www.biblioiranica.info/resources/>

A predominantly bibliographic blog for Iranian Studies

Encyclopædia Iranica

is a comprehensive research tool dedicated to the study of Iranian civilization in the Middle East, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Indian subcontinent

<https://www.iranicaonline.org/>

Silk Road Seattle

University of Washington

<https://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/>

an ongoing public education project using the "Silk Road" theme to explore cultural interaction across Eurasia from the beginning of the Common Era (A. D.) to the Seventeenth Century

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

<https://plato.stanford.edu/contents.html>

A great resource for information about philosophers worldwide thru history

The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online

<https://www.rep.routledge.com/>

The largest and most comprehensive resource available for those involved in the study of philosophy. Great essays and biographies of philosophers. Unfortunately, only abstracts can be viewed unless you have an academic connection to a member institution.

Islamic Philosophy Online

PHILOSOPHIA ISLAMICA

<https://muslimphilosophy.org/about>

The Internet Archive

A digital library of Internet sites and other cultural artifacts in digital form – where you can myriads of books and articles not available elsewhere

<https://archive.org/>