

**The Rise & Fall of the Sasanian Empire**  
HIST3180 FW2022/'23  
Tues & Thurs 11:30-12:50 (ACW009 & R S103)

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Office Hours: Tuesday 1:30-2:30

### **Course Description**

The course will cover the Sasanians of Iran, their origins, rise, domination of the Middle East, and their subsequent defeat and fall at the hands of the Arab Muslims. The Sasanid Empire was the last of the great pre-Islamic Middle Eastern states. Equal attention will be paid to the political, economic, religious, and cultural developments. Periodic reference will be made to the elements that had a direct impact on Islamic civilization. Among the themes and topics covered: The topography of Iraq and Iran; the impact of Mesopotamian, Iranian and Hellenistic culture; the nature and development of Zoroastrianism; the fall of the Parthians and the establishment of the Sasanian state; administrative and legal reforms; economic production and trade; aspects of Sasanid jurisprudence; family and gender relations; art and architecture; the imperial capital at Ctesiphon; Zoroastrian heresies and the spread of Judaism, Christianity and Gnosticism; the struggle with Rome and Byzantium; the relationship with Central Asia; the threat from Arabia; the fall in Iraq; the continuing legacy of the Sasanians in Islamic civilization.

### **Readings**

- M. Boyce, *Zoroastrians, Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*.
- M. al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari, vol.5*
- Selections from:

*The Circle of Ancient Iranian Studies* [www.cais-soas.com](http://www.cais-soas.com)

*Iran Chamber Society* [www.iranchamber.com](http://www.iranchamber.com)

*The Encyclopædia Iranica (EI)* [www.iranicaonline.org](http://www.iranicaonline.org)

Additional on-line articles or chapters of e-books.

### **Requirements**

- 1) Five 400-500 word essays. 30% (6% each)
- 2) Two end-of-term exams (Midterm & Final). 50% (25% each)
- 3) One short (12 pages) research paper. 20%

### **Essays**

All essays should be typed, double-spaced, 12-point font, 1-inch margins on all sides and handed in via Turnitin. You must be prepared to discuss your essays and explain your arguments if called upon. Essay questions will be posted on the Moodle site and explained in class. Essays handed in after the due date will be deducted one grade and an additional grade thereafter for each following day. Exceptions can be made for illness or family emergency at the instructor's discretion.

### **Exams**

Exams are 3 hours long and will consist of three parts: Identifications (about 120-150 words each, 35%), Short Answers (about 200-300 words each, 30%), and one Essay (about 700-900 words, 35%). Identifications will be limited to terms listed on the Moodle site. Samples of short answers and essay questions will be given in class during review session. Exams will be held during the university-mandated exam periods. Exact date will be set by the registrar's office and announced in class.

## BASICS

**Grading:** The grading scheme for the course conforms to the 9-point grading system used in undergraduate programs at York (e.g. A+ =9, A=8, B+=7, C+=5, etc). Assignments and tests will bear either a letter grade designation or a corresponding number grade (e.g. A+ = 90 to 100; A = 80-89, B+=75-79, B=70-74; C+=65-69, C=60-64, etc). For a full description of York's grading system, see [http://calendars.registrar.yorku.ca/2012-2013/faculty\\_rules/AP/grading.htm](http://calendars.registrar.yorku.ca/2012-2013/faculty_rules/AP/grading.htm)

**Religious Observance Accommodation:** Information at <https://w2prod.sis.yorku.ca/Apps/WebObjects/cdm.woa/wa/regobs>

**History Department:** Located on the second floor of Vari Hall, 2140. The usual office hours during the academic term are M-F, 8:30am-4:00pm. The department's phone number for general inquiries is 416-736-5123. During lockdown you can contact the department via email at [lapshist@yorku.ca](mailto:lapshist@yorku.ca). Upcoming events, resources for undergraduate history students, faculty and staff information, and much more: <http://www.yorku.ca/uhistory/>

**Undergraduate Program in History:** Links to information on history major career paths, degree programs (what is required for majors, minors, etc.), and degree checklists: <https://www.yorku.ca/laps/hist/undergrad/>

**History Advising Hours:** The History department offers online advising times weekly. The hours are posted on our website 1-2 weeks in advance. The days and times change to accommodate student's different schedules. No appointment is necessary; students will be seen on a first-come, first-served basis. The Director of Undergraduate Studies can be contacted at [dushist@yorku.ca](mailto:dushist@yorku.ca).

**Writing Centre:** One-to-one help with a writing instructor on any writing assignment. You will need to enroll to set up your appointment, though they also offer some drop-in sessions. The enrollment link and further information is found at <https://www.yorku.ca/laps/writing-centre/>. Bring a copy of your assignment to your appointment.

**York University Libraries:** Links to the main catalogue, e-resources, on-line help chat line with librarian, and many other research aids: <http://www.library.yorku.ca/web/>

**SPARK [Student Papers and Academic Research Kit]:** This is an on-line tutorial that provides handy tips and tools for understanding and successfully completing university-level assignments. Go to <https://spark.library.yorku.ca>

**Learning Disability Services:** Information about LDS at <https://accessibility.students.yorku.ca/>

**York Student Code of Conduct:** <https://oscr.students.yorku.ca/student-conduct>

**Academic Honesty Statement:** Violations of the York Senate Policy on Academic Honesty will be treated severely. Recent penalties have included failure in the course, suspension from the University, and withholding or rescinding a York degree, diploma or certificate. Cheating during in-class or take-home examinations, collaborating on written assignments, failing to use quotations marks and citations when using or paraphrasing the printed or electronically disseminated work of others, aiding or abetting academic misconduct, and violating any other part of the Policy on Academic Honesty will result in penalties. For further details, see the relevant part of the York Website: <http://secretariat-policies.info.yorku.ca/policies/academic-honesty-senate-policy-on/>

### Important Add/Drop Deadlines:

Last date to enroll WITHOUT permission of course director: September 20, 2022

Last date to enroll WITH permission of course director: October 25, 2022

Last date to drop courses without receiving a grade: February 10, 2022

Course Withdrawal Period (Receive a "W" on transcript): February 11 - April 11, 2022

## Schedule for First Term

### Part 1: Background (8 Sep - 6 Oct)

“Iran in Pre-Islamic Times” (read up to the *Arsacids*): [www.iranicaonline.org/articles/iran-ii1-pre-islamic-times#1](http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/iran-ii1-pre-islamic-times#1)

M. Boyce, 1-100

“Zoroastrianism, i” (read up to the *Sasanians*) <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/zoroastrianism-i-historical-review>

Maria Brosius, *The Persians*, ch.3: [www.library.yorku.ca/find/Record/2303858](http://www.library.yorku.ca/find/Record/2303858)

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|--|---------------------------------------|
| I. The Land & Its People                     | II. A Brief History to c.200 CE       |
| III. The Early Development of Zoroastrianism | IV. Collapse of Arsacid/Parthian Rule |
| V. Early Sasanian Wars of Conquest           |                                       |

**Essay 1 due via Turnitin on or before 4 Oct.**

**\*\*\* Fall Reading Week 8-14 Oct. No class on 11, 13 Oct.**

### Part 2: Early Sasanian Rule (18 Oct - 3 Nov)

Tabari: 1-50; Boyce: 101-118

“Rise of the Sasanian empire” to “The Age of Šāpur II”: [www.iranicaonline.org/articles/sasanian-dynasty](http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/sasanian-dynasty)

“Manichaeism”: [www.iranchamber.com/religions/articles/manichaeism1.php](http://www.iranchamber.com/religions/articles/manichaeism1.php)

“Šāpur II”: [www.iranicaonline.org/articles/shapur-ii](http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/shapur-ii)

Kartir’s Inscription: [www.avesta.org/mp/kz.html](http://www.avesta.org/mp/kz.html)

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| VI. Early Administration   | VII. The Manichean Challenge |
| VIII. Reforms of Shapur II |                              |

**Essay 2 due via Turnitin on or before 11 Nov.**

### Part 3: Crisis & Reform (8 Nov - 6 Dec)

Tabari: 50-146; Boyce: 118-132

Tabari, 146-164, 252-268, 285-295, 338-373

“Mazdakism”: [www.iranchamber.com/religions/articles/mazdakism.php](http://www.iranchamber.com/religions/articles/mazdakism.php)

Agathais on Khusraw (Appendix A: pp.165-171): [www.jstor.org/stable/1291291](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1291291)

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| IX. Crisis of the 3 <sup>rd</sup> century | X. The Mazdakite Revolt               |
| XI. Khusraw Anushirvan                    | XII. Tie Lose Ends, Summary Thus Far. |

**Essay 3 due via Turnitin on or before 2 Dec.**

**Term Paper topics due via Turnitin on or before 6 Dec.**

**Mid-term Exam:** Will be scheduled by the Registrar between 8-23 Dec.

## Schedule for Second Term

### Part 4: Aspects of the Empire at Its Apogee I (10 Jan - 9 Feb)

Boyce, 130-145.

“Sassanian Army”: [www.iranchamber.com/history/sassanids/sassanian\\_army.php](http://www.iranchamber.com/history/sassanids/sassanian_army.php)

Economy: [www.iranchamber.com/history/articles/sassanian\\_economy.php](http://www.iranchamber.com/history/articles/sassanian_economy.php)

“Family Law: i. In Zoroastrianism”: <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/family-law>

I. The Sasanian Army

II. Economy

III. Society I

IV. Society II

**Essay 4 due via Turnitin on or before 10 Feb.**

### Part 5: Aspects of the Empire at Its Apogee II (7 Feb - 9 Mar)

Christianity: [www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Religions/non-iranian/aba\\_church.htm](http://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Religions/non-iranian/aba_church.htm)

Judaism: [www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Religions/non-iranian/Judaism/judaism\\_iran.htm](http://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Religions/non-iranian/Judaism/judaism_iran.htm)

Judaeo-Persian Communities iii: <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/judaeo-persian-communities-iii-parthian-and-sasanian-periods>

Architecture: [www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Architecture/sasanian\\_architecture.htm](http://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Architecture/sasanian_architecture.htm)

Art: [www.iranchamber.com/art/articles/art\\_of\\_sasanians.php](http://www.iranchamber.com/art/articles/art_of_sasanians.php)

“Arabia ii”: <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/arabia-ii-sasanians-and-arabia>

V. Judaism

VI. Christianity

**\*\*\* Winter Reading Week 18-24 Feb. No class on 21, 23 Feb.**

**Term Paper Bibliography and outline due via Turnitin on or before 28 Feb.**

**Essay 5 due via Turnitin on or before 10 Mar.**

VII. Foreign Relations

VIII. Art & Architecture

### Part 6: Crisis & Collapse (14 Mar - 6 Apr)

Tabari, 305-338, 381-412; Boyce, 145-163.

Account of the Sack of Jerusalem: [www.jstor.org/stable/549886](http://www.jstor.org/stable/549886)

al-Tabari, “The Battle of Qadisiyyah”

“After the Fall”: [www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/History/Post-Sasanian/after\\_fall.htm](http://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/History/Post-Sasanian/after_fall.htm)

IX. The Conquests of Khusraw Parvis

X. Setback and Civil Strife

XI. Islamic Invasions & Sassanid Collapse

XII. Tie Up Loose Ends and Review

**Term Paper due via Turnitin before midnight Monday 10 Apr.**

**Final Exam:** Will be scheduled by the Registrar between 12-27 Apr.