This course will familiarize students with the more important trends in Arabic literature during the period when it dominated literary production in the Islamic world, as well as giving relevant information about salient developments in creative expression, both in Arabic and other national traditions before the rise of Islam. Knowledge of Arabic is not required.

In the quarter, we will trace the course of classical/medieval Arabic literature from its beginnings in the pre-Islamic period (approximately 500-600 C.E.) to the end of the Abbasid caliphate, which fell to the Mongols in 1258 C.E. While such a survey approach will necessitate a strong emphasis on literary history, other topics to be discussed will include: rhetorical elements of the Arabic language, the crystallization of the qasidah poem, literature in a religious and courtly context, the role of women in the development of classical Arabic literature, attitudes toward fictional narrative, and the interests underlying canon-formation—that is, which authors and texts become part of the educational system, how they are read, and by whom.

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