

MA Seminar: Islam in archaeology

- winter semester 2025/26 -

This seminar touches three related terms: archaeology, religion, and Islam. Archaeology is the study of past societies through their material culture in spatial or temporal context. Archaeologists speculate on the function of artefacts and spaces, on their producers and users, and on their symbolic meaning. One of the directions of research is interpreting past people's identities such as gender, class, ethnicity, profession, education, or religion. We should bear in mind, however, that this set of modern categories was not necessarily present in ancient times or within all past communities. In other words, 'religion' is a category which has not necessarily existed everywhere as an identity or affiliation for the community of users. Nonetheless, archaeologist can define 'religion' and then try to identify it in the material culture. The third entity in our seminar's triangle is Islam. 'Islam' is seen in various ways: as a culture, as a political system of specific people, or as a historical framework of medieval contexts. Yet, it is often understood as a 'religion'.

In the course, we will try to trace evidence for Islam as a religion in archaeology. We will first introduce Islamic law and religious dogma, and then we will try to identify it in specific architecture (e.g. mosques), activities (e.g. food consumption or burial) and archaeological texts (i.e. inscriptions). Other themes, such as shared spaces and Islamization will be discussed as well. Through the seminar, we will discover the gaps between the religious ideal and the archaeological reality and perhaps adapt our expectations.

ONLINE, Mondays 16:30-18:00
October 20th 2025 to February 9th 2026

Requirements and credit:

The course can be credited with 4 CP, granted for an active participation in class, reading the required papers for every class, and presenting one of the papers to the peers. Additional 2 CP are possible for a research paper. However, crediting relies on the system at the candidate's home university.

The candidate should have at least a B2 level of spoken English, a PC or a laptop with a camera, and an excellent internet connection. Before the course, an online meeting will be scheduled to evaluate the candidate's level of English and their internet connection.

The use of AI is allowed ONLY for the proofreading of English.

Interested?

- If you are a Goethe MA student, or a Goethe BA student at your 7th or 8th semester, please directly register in OLAT.
- If you are an MA student at another university, please send your application to h.nol@em.uni-frankfurt.de by September 25th. This should include: a brief motivation letter (of one page maximum), a CV, and a BA certificate (or proof of 3-year BA studies).