Cultural History of the Islamic Garden (7th to the 14th Centuries)

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Course Description
The central theme of this course is the articulation of medieval Islamic gardens in terms of their relationship to the history of the landscape beyond the garden, Islamic cultural and literary history, architectural history and contemporary ideas about perception. How gardens were understood in terms of diversity and different contexts clarify this theme: landscape and garden culture in the Umayyad period, Solomonic themes, mosque development in relation to the garden, and how Damascus served as an example of a city garden setting.

Two case studies develop the idea of unity. In twelfth and thirteenth century Sicily a sense of unity was achieved by setting gardens and architecture within the landscape around Palermo. Norman rulers, sometimes called 'Baptized Sultans', and their successor, Frederick II, developed and extended this landscape, and were all influenced by Islamic geography, science and learning. In the second case study, the Court of the Lions, at The Alhambra, a sense of unity was achieved by the garden's architectural setting and the role of inscriptions in guiding the viewers' perceptions.

Section One: Introductory Themes
The historical context of the Islamic garden
Definitions and classifications of garden and landscape
Ideas about perception and garden history
Islamic garden history: sources
The Islamic garden and the idea of paradise

Selected reading:
• Elliot, Jason, Mirrors of the Unseen: Journeys in Iran (London: Picador, 2006).
• Moynihan, Elizabeth B., Paradise as a Garden in Persia and Mughal India (New York: George Braziller, 1980).
• Richardson, Tim, and Noel Kingsbury, Vista: the culture and politics of gardens (London: Frances Lincoln, 2005).

Section Two: Landscape History
Pre-Islamic and Islamic landscape history
Irrigation and water management
Agriculture and animals

Selected reading:

• Hoyland, Robert, Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam (London: Routledge, 2001).
• Schimmel, Annemarie, Islam and the Wonders of Creation: The Animal Kingdom
Section Three: Ideas About Nature and Culture

Pre-Islamic influences
Ideas about nature in Islamic culture
Some early Islamic texts

Selected reading:

- Evan Goodman, Lenn, trans., The Case of the Animals versus Man Against the King of the Jinn (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978).

Section Four: The Garden in Early Islamic Culture: Themes and Diversity

The Umayyad garden and Khirbat al-Mafjar
Solomonic themes
The mosque and the garden
The city and the garden: Damascus

Selected reading:

Section Five: Two Case Studies

Landscape and garden in medieval Sicily

The Court of the Lions at the Alhambra

Selected reading:

- Massetti, Marco, 'In the gardens of Norman Palermo, Sicily', Anthropozoologica, 44 (2), (2009), 7-34.
Section Six: Conclusions and Suggestions for Further Study

1. The interdisciplinary nature of garden and landscape history
2. Issues raised by the study of the Islamic garden history
3. Influences on the work of twentieth and twenty-first century Western garden designers, for example: Jacques Majorelle, John Brookes, Russell Page, Fernando Caruncho.
4. Suggestions for further study: poetry and the Islamic garden, Islamic garden history and the decorative arts, the role of science and technology in Islamic garden history, redefining ideas about paradise, Islamic garden history and environmentalism.