CHARACTER OF THE MIDDLE EASTERN CITY

[open to majors and non-majors of junior undergrad standing and all grad levels]

The vast region of the Middle East and North Africa, or “MENA,” are often grouped together for historical, geopolitical and economic reasons, as well as for spatial study. The countries and areas include: Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, West Bank and Gaza, and Yemen...and sometimes the Russian Caucasus and Pakistan. **Major languages of the region are:** Arabic, Hebrew, Persian (Farsi), and Turkish.

What makes this region important and worthy of news everyday? What makes the cities in this region complexly layered, interconnected, intriguing, and full of character? **Character encompasses many things.** We will look at manifestations of urban atmosphere alongside the physical characteristics and morphology of the city; we will see how people experience and inhabit a place with their customs and lifestyle. We will investigate the city and the interrelationship of modernity, colonialization, the affect of old empires, and the simultaneous condition of globalization and localization. We will consider the historical nature of many cities, and how these places have been sustained over time. We will look at current events and try to understand how the politics of public space is changing identity and shaping design and use.

Various multidisciplinary readings, lectures on spotlighted topics and cities – by instructor, guests and student groups, films, dialogue and making things will inform us. Two investigative projects (one shared with class/one individual): a. comparative mapping at different scales and time periods, looking into city districts and architecture, streets, secular/public space, religious zones, and spatial building types; b. creative visualizing and analysis of social, political, behavioral relationships found through street life and in public spaces and/or through contemporary international literature (a short paper with similar topics may be substituted).

**Sample readings from:** On Global Grounds: Urban Change and Globalization; Postmetropolis: Critical studies of cities and regions; Formal Structure in Islamic Architecture of Iran and Turkestan; Contemporary Architecture and Urbanism in the Middle East; Architecture for a Changing World: The Aga Khan Award for Architecture; Istanbul: Memories and the City; Brave Optimism of Tahrir Square Meets Other Fierce Forces; The Mellah of Marrakesh Jewish and Muslim Space in Morocco’s Red City; Encyclopedia of Vernacular Architecture of the World; A New Wave of Migrants...