

Media Contact: Genevieve Antaky  
510/435-8092, [gantaky@comcast.net](mailto:gantaky@comcast.net)  
Public Info: Humanities West [www.humanitieswest.org](http://www.humanitieswest.org)  
Tickets: City Box Office 415/392-4400, [www.cityboxoffice.com](http://www.cityboxoffice.com)

**HUMANITIES WEST'S 30<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY SEASON CONTINUES WITH**  
***Baghdad in Its Golden Age (762-1300)***  
**Friday & Saturday, April 25 & 26, 2014**  
**Marines' Memorial Theatre, San Francisco**

Humanities West completes its 30th Anniversary Season with ***Baghdad in Its Golden Age (762-1300)***, a two-day program of lectures, discussions, and musical performances exploring the brilliance of "The Round City of Peace" at the height of its political, cultural, and religious influence. The program takes place on Friday, April 25, from 7:30 pm to 9:45 pm and Saturday, April 26, from 10 am to 4 pm, at the Marines' Memorial Theatre, 609 Sutter Street, in San Francisco.

Tickets for ***Baghdad in Its Golden Age (762-1300)*** are priced as follows: Single tickets for individual Friday programs are \$55 orchestra and \$45 balcony and individual Saturday programs are \$80 orchestra and \$55 balcony, single tickets for both days of each program are \$120 orchestra and \$75 balcony. Special Student/Teacher tickets are available at \$20 balcony for single day admission. Order direct from City Box Office at 415/392-4400 or [www.cityboxoffice.com](http://www.cityboxoffice.com). For more information call Humanities West at 415/391-9700 or check the website for complete program descriptions and related programs at: [www.humanitieswest.org](http://www.humanitieswest.org).

***Baghdad in Its Golden Age (762-1300)***, Humanities West's final program of its 30th Anniversary Season, brings together a panel of respected scholars and artists to present lectures and performances exploring the brilliance of "The Round City of Peace." From its founding in 762, Baghdad thrived as the political, cultural, religious, and commercial center of the Muslim empire. Abbasid caliphs ruled over diverse populations of Muslims, Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, and polytheists, whose ethnic identities ranged from Arab to Persian and Turkish to Berber—all of whom contributed to the vitality of this great city. At its House of Wisdom, scholars from across the empire translated important writings from the pre-Islamic past into Arabic, advancing the fragmented literary and scientific knowledge of ancient Greece, Persia, and India. Chinese paper technology enabled Baghdad bookstores to sell thousands of books a day. This two-day program explores the extraordinary intellectual and cultural influence of Baghdad at its height, as well as its enduring legacy in both the west and east as it continues to this day.

This program is presented with support from the Center for Middle East Studies at UC Berkeley.

On Friday evening, **Paul M Cobb** (*University of Pennsylvania*) provides the opening lecture ***The Elephant from Baghdad: The City of Peace, the West, and the Golden Age of Islam***. Around the year 800 AD, the leader of the Muslim world (Harun al-Rashid of Baghdad), sent an elephant to the leader of the Christian world (Charlemagne of Aachen, in Germany). Cobb's lecture examines the importance of this gift and what it tells us about Islamic civilization in the early Middle Ages, the glory of Baghdad at this time, and the history of relations between the Islamic world and the West.

The evening culminates with a musical performance, ***In the Fair Garden – Music for the Golden Age of Baghdad***. **Gari Hegedus** joins Bay Area medieval ensemble **Cançonier**, featuring **Shira Kammen** and **Tim Rayborn**, to present a tribute to the achievements of this great city, reflecting its status as a center of learning and culture. Using medieval and Middle Eastern instruments, the group will present traditional Iraqi songs, early medieval melodies of the Armenians and Eastern Jews, medieval European songs that reference the city, and improvised music.

On Saturday, **Fred Astren** (*SFSU*) presents a lecture on ***Medieval Baghdad: Metropolis and Court; Reading and Writing***. This lecture considers the influence of Baghdad's House of Wisdom, founded by the caliph al-Ma'mun to translate great writings from the pre-Islamic past into Arabic and later Persian. Astren discusses how the translation of these documents accelerated the revolution in literacy by fostering the learning of poetry, oratory, grammar, and the history of the pre-Islamic Arabs.

**Margaret Larkin** (*UC Berkeley*) follows with a presentation on ***Imagining Baghdad: The Thousand and One Nights: the Facts of its Fiction***. This talk will explore the well-known collection of popular stories known as *The Thousand and One Nights*, a composite work that blends tales of India and Persia with stories and traditions of Syria, Egypt, and Iraq. Professor Larkin provides an examination of the work's literary journey over time and its treatment at the hands of a diversely-motivated cast of translators and adapters.

**Patricia Blessing** (*Stanford*) continues the program with ***Art and Architecture during the Golden Age of Islam***, an illustrated lecture focusing on the arts and architecture of Islam during the Abbasid period, beginning with the foundation of Baghdad in 762 to the Mongol conquest of the city in 1258. Ceramics, rich stucco decoration, paintings and illustrations will be discussed. The final talk, ***Baghdad: The City of Wisdom (750-1300)***, by **Ali Yaycioğlu** (*Stanford*) explores the great city as created by the Abbasid elites, not only as a political center but also as the intellectual center of the Islamic Empire. Baghdad's round shape was seen as the manifestation of the new Islamic cosmology, and the Abbasid court became the primary patron of the wise men who fostered Islamic philosophy and Arabic literature. The new cosmology of Islam in the 8th and 9th centuries was materialized in a newly designed urban space, and the vibrant intellectual life and court politics of Baghdad shaped what was later called the Golden Age of Islam.

A panel discussion with all the presenters will follow, addressing questions from the audience.

\*Ancillary programs providing opportunities to learn more about the featured topic and related issues complement this two-day event. For a complete program schedule and additional information about the presenters please visit [www.humanitieswest.org](http://www.humanitieswest.org).

\*\*\*\*

**Humanities West**, a non-profit serving the Bay Area since 1983, is devoted to exploring history to celebrate the mind and the arts. The only independent non-profit offering humanities and arts programs of this scale, Humanities West presents a diverse series of lectures and performances encompassing fine and performing arts, social history, music, politics, and philosophy of the arts. These multidisciplinary programs are designed to entertain and educate audiences and to illuminate and elevate the human spirit through exploration of the many sources of modern culture.

\*\*\*\*

## **CALENDAR LISTING: EVENTS/LECTURES/ARTS & CULTURE**

**WHAT:** Humanities West presents *Baghdad in Its Golden Age (762-1300)*, a two-day program of lectures, discussions, and musical performances exploring the brilliance of "The Round City of Peace" that thrived for centuries as the political, cultural, and religious center of the Muslim empire.

Speakers include Paul M. Cobb (*University of Pennsylvania*), Fred Astren (*SFSU*), Margaret Larkin (*UC Berkeley*), Patricia Blessing (*Stanford*), and Ali Yaycioğlu (*Stanford*).

Musical performance by Bay Area medieval ensemble *Cançonier*, featuring Shira Kammen and Tim Rayborn, with special guest Gari Hegedus.

This program is presented with support from the Center for Middle East Studies at UC Berkeley.

**WHEN:** 7:30pm to 9:30pm, Friday, April 25, 2014  
10am to 4pm, Saturday, April 26, 2014

**WHERE:** Marines' Memorial Theatre  
609 Sutter Street, San Francisco

**TICKETS:** \$20 - \$80  
Tickets are available through City Box Office at  
415-392-4400 or online at [www.cityboxoffice.com](http://www.cityboxoffice.com)  
Group tickets: [info@humanitieswest.org](mailto:info@humanitieswest.org)

**PUBLIC INFO:** 415/391-9700 or [www.humanitieswest.org](http://www.humanitieswest.org)

\*\*\*\*\*

### **\*RELATED EVENTS for *Baghdad in Its Golden Age (762-1300)***

#### **Humanities West Book Discussion with Lynn Harris**

##### ***The Arabian Nights: Tales from A Thousand and One Nights***

Richard Burton translation

**When:** 5:30pm, Wednesday, April 16, 2014

**Where:** Board Room, Commonwealth Club of San Francisco  
595 Market Street, SF, CA

**Cost:** \$5

**RSVP:** [commonwealthclub.org](http://commonwealthclub.org)

Co-Sponsored by the Humanities Member-Led Forum

#### **Fireside Chat with George Hammond – *Medieval Baghdad***

Join George Hammond for a pre-view of the 2-day program *Baghdad in Its Golden Age*

**When:** 6:30pm, Tuesday, April 22, 2014

**Where:** Orinda Library,  
26 Orinda Way, Orinda, CA

**Cost:** Free

#### **Diversity and Accomplishment:**

##### **Celebrating Assyrian Contributions to Baghdad's Golden Age with Nicholas Al-Jeloo**

Join Nicholas Al-Jeloo (PhD in Syriac Studies, Sydney, 2013) for a talk on the diversity and accomplishments of Medieval Baghdad. Arab Muslims, Christians and Jews were a vital part of Baghdad from 762 until the Mongol conquest in 1258. The city functioned as the center of Islamic, Christian and Jewish worlds. Many who contributed to Baghdad's intellectual and cultural greatness in its House of Wisdom were Aramaic-speaking ethnic Assyrians--religious leaders, scientists, physicians, and philosophers. Their contributions had a major impact on the 'Abbasid court, its intellectual institutions and on Islamic civilization itself, both in Baghdad's golden age and in our modern world. Sponsored by the Assyrian Foundation of America and presented in association with The Mechanics' Institute Library.

**When:** 6pm, Thursday, April 24, 2014

**Where:** Commonwealth Club of San Francisco  
595 Market Street, SF, CA

**Cost:** \$20

**RSVP:** [commonwealthclub.org](http://commonwealthclub.org) or 415.597.6700

**Humanities West Book Discussion with Lynn Harris**

***The Caliph's Splendor: Islam and the West in the Golden Age of Baghdad***

by Benson Bobrick (2012)

**When: 5:30pm, Wednesday, April 30, 2014**

**Where:** Board Room, Commonwealth Club of San Francisco  
595 Market Street, SF, CA

**Cost:** \$5

**RSVP:** [commonwealthclub.org](http://commonwealthclub.org)

Co-Sponsored by the Humanities Member-Led Forum

**#30#**