RELI 681
Arabic Sources on American Slavery

Professor Carl Ernst
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Mondays & Wednesdays
2:30PM-5:20PM

Prerequisite
3 years of Arabic or the equivalent, and permission of instructor. Open to advanced undergraduates and graduate students.

This is a research seminar focusing on Arabic writings of enslaved Africans, particularly Omar ibn Said (1770-1864), who in 1831 wrote an autobiography in Arabic while enslaved in Bladen County, North Carolina. The focus of the class will be on his writings, including over a dozen manuscripts containing letters and short extracts from the Qur'an and the Bible, several of which are in the Wilson Library at UNC. Students will transcribe the Arabic manuscripts, produce a critical edition, and translate them with the aim of producing a joint online publication edited by the instructor. They will also present, through a multi-stage process, oral reports and research papers on these documents in the context of slavery, and the controversy over the supposed conversion of Omar to Christianity.

This course will serve as an equivalent to ARAB 401, and it forms part of the 2019-20 UNC initiative on “Reckoning: Race, Memory, and Reimagining the Public University.”