

SACRED AND SECULAR HISTORY IN THE MODERN MIDDLE EAST

STEINER 201 ■ ELFENBEI@GRINNELL.EDU ■ X4352
OFFICE HOURS: M, 10-11 & TH 12:45-2:00

COURSE NARRATIVE AND DESCRIPTION

Over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, communities in the Middle East experienced profound transformations in myriad fields of life. By the end of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, actors in the region – while holding vastly different hopes and desires – typically agreed on one fundamental premise: Communities throughout the region were in crisis and were in need of re-formation. The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, coming after decades of growing European power in the region, created the conditions for the emergence of new collective identities. How would communities in the region come to understand themselves? How would they delineate insider from outsider? What might they draw on to articulate the foundations of governance? What traditions might they consult to identify the goals of collective life?

It is no coincidence that the nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw a proliferation of new histories in the Middle East, including those grounding local nationalisms, regional nationalisms, and piety-based Islamism. These new histories were neither entirely “indigenous” nor “derivative,” bringing together historiographic traditions from the region as well as new methods of historical investigation deriving from European intellectual traditions. In a moment in which many national communities in the Middle East that emerged from these “new histories” are struggling through questions of membership, governance, and the identification of collective goals, it behooves us to consider how over the last two hundred plus years groups in the region have debated, drawn on, and departed from myriad historiographic traditions to forge new communities, and articulate the goals around which communities coalesce.

We will begin our investigation by considering core texts in Islamic historiography, including *Tarikh al-Tabari* (9th/10th century CE), which provides a foundation in what we can call Islamic “sacred historiography,” and Ibn Khaldun’s *Muqaddimah*, which signals an important shift in Islamic historiographic traditions. While the term “sacred history” may be somewhat anachronistic, it helps us highlight how conceptions of history change over time. This is especially significant regarding historiographic transformations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when communities in the region began to imagine themselves – and their place in histories – in new (sometimes “secular”) ways. The second part of our common readings will explore this transformation as it manifested in particular contexts.

As we work on the common readings we will also give attention to the seminar research project. The subject of historiography in the Middle East lends itself to exploring any number of issues, including specific instances of nationalism, Islamist thought, gender and community, models of economic activity/development, theories and practices of government, and the place of literary and material culture in popular historiography.

COURSE TEXTS

I have assembled a reader that includes a number of primary and secondary scholarly sources. I have noted readings from this material in the syllabus with an (R). Other course readings include the following texts (available in the bookstore):

James Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East: A History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Nur Masalha, *The Bible and Zionism*. New York: Zed Books, 2007.

Tignor and Jabarti, *Al-Jabarti's Chronicle of Napoleon in Egypt*. Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2006.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

COURSE ENGAGEMENT: 25%

Successful participation in this course depends on your overall engagement with the course. I expect that each of you will attend class and take an active role in class discussion, but engagement consists of more than that. It speaks to the quality of your preparation, including any posts I ask you to make to course discussion boards, the care that you take in presenting writing assignments free of careless errors, and your self-motivation in the research process. In short, your course engagement grade will be a reflection of the attention you give to our work together.

While we will address specific questions in each section of the course, there are some general questions that will help you prepare for class throughout the semester.

- Can you identify a sentence or sentences that constitute the thesis statement?
- Can you state the author's thesis – even regarding a single chapter or article – succinctly in your own words?
- If part of a larger work, how does a chapter(s) fit into the bigger picture? If a stand-alone piece, can you relate this reading to another that we have completed in the course?
- What kind of evidence does the author provide to support her/his argument?
- How does the author contextualize the specific material under consideration?
- Does the author successfully make her/his case?

As you read the primary documents with which we will work, please keep the following questions in mind:

- Who is writing? What do you think was their purpose in so doing?
- What is the larger relevant context? (Beware of anachronistic analysis!)

- What is the author's relative position of power in the context of the document's production?
- How does this document support or call into question claims made by the authors of our secondary sources?
- What is the author's conception of history? What is the relationship between history and community?

SHORT WRITING ASSIGNMENTS: 15%

You are responsible for completing two 2-3 page short essays before spring break. I will post topics from week to week and you may choose two to complete.

PRESENTATIONS: 20%

After spring break, we will meet once a week to discuss your progress on your final research project. (I will be available to meet with you individually on these other class-meeting day.) These discussions will culminate in a formal presentation of your work (approximately 20 minutes). I am tentatively planning on Thursday, May 2, as our presentation day, though this is subject to negotiation/change.

RESEARCH PROJECT: 40%

Your final research project consists of a 20-25-page essay on a topic of your choice. A successful essay will (1) build an argument around primary sources and situate your argument in a field of secondary literature or (2) provide a critical analysis of scholarly literature on a given matter. We will focus on this project in weeks nine through 15, during which time you will be responsible for completing three discreet steps. We will work together to establish a project timeline (including due dates), though the earlier you can begin to think about a possible topic the better (so that you can ILL material, for example).

1. Proposal with initial bibliography (5%)
2. Introduction and narrative outline with expanded bibliography (10%)
3. Full draft (25%)

COURSE POLICIES

- I will return your e-mail within 24 hours whenever possible. If you have questions about finding material, etc., you can always check with a colleague first (to likely receive a more immediate response).
- I will accept *only* hard copies of written work (unless otherwise noted). All work is due in class. I do not want to hear excuses about printing problems. You are responsible for planning your time in such a way that you can turn your work in on time.
- Know that I am pre-disposed to saying no to requests for extensions. I provide plenty of notice for each of the assignments – it is your responsibility to plan your time

accordingly. That said, please do not be shy about approaching me for an extension if you have extenuating circumstances. It is essential to keep lines of communication open.

- If I suspect that you are using computers in class for anything other than note taking or document viewing, you will lose your computer privileges for the remainder of the semester. (If I suspect that you are texting in class I will ask that you leave your phone with me at the start of each class. Cell phones should be set on silent.)
- If you are involved in an extra-curricular activity that will take you away from campus be sure to let me know beforehand. Regardless of the reason (except for dire family emergency, hospitalization), if I do not hear from you *before* you miss class I will assume you are simply skipping class.
- Breaches of academic integrity will result in an official disciplinary process guided by the Dean's office. Although I will inform you of any action I take, I will not negotiate with you privately about such matters. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism I suggest you consult the Student Handbook immediately.
- It is essential to me that everyone in the class has the same opportunity to thrive. Please let me know of any particular learning needs you have (assuming they are on file with the college) and we will work together to make sure that you get the most from this learning experience.

COURSE READINGS AND SCHEDULE

Week 1 (January 22, 24): Foundational Histories

- Class 1: Introductions
- Class 2: Khalidi, pp. 1-48, 65-82 (R)

Week 2 (January 29, 31): Foundational Histories, cont.

- Class 1: Donner (R)
- Class 2: Al-Tabari (R)

Week 3 (February 5, 7): Theorizing Historiography and Community

- Class 1: Khalidi, pp. 83-111, 182-234
- Class 2: Humphreys (R), Ibn Khaldun "On History" (R)

Week 4 (February 12, 14) Theorizing and Exploring Historiography and Community

- Class 1: "Khalifa" (R), Ibn Khaldun "on the Caliphate" (R)

- Class 2: Gelvin, Part I; Finkel, 1-2 (R); Al-Jabarti (selections)

Week 5 (February 19, 21): Exploring Historiography and Community

- Class 1: Al-Jabarti (selections)
- Class 2: Gelvin, 69-99; Finkel, 447-487 (R)

Week 6 (February 26, 28): Constructing the Modern Middle East

- Class 1: Gelvin, 133-157; Finkel, 488-525
- Class 2: Gelvin, Part III; Almog (R)

Week 7 (March 5, 7): Sacred/Secular Historiography: Israel/Palestine

- Class 1: Almog (R)
- Class 2: Masalha (selections)

Week 8 (March 12, 14): Israel/Palestine, cont.

- Class 1: Gelvin, 233-293
- Individual Meetings
- Class 2: Gelvin, 283-326
- Individual Meetings

Weeks 9-14: Research and Writing

- Meetings TBD

RESEARCH RESOURCES

This is a brief guide to help you *begin* your research. I strongly encourage you to make a “library lab” appointment with Grinnell’s history librarian, Catherine Rodd (rod@grinnell.edu), to help you along with your search.

It might be a good idea to begin the research process in one of three ways (and they aren’t necessarily mutually exclusive).

1. Using the Middle East studies subject guides below, look for particular subject guides that provide resources for the topics you may be interested in. These guides will introduce you to book- and article-length scholarly sources as well as direct you to relevant primary sources where available.
2. Look for articles in scholarly journals that touch on the issues you are interested in. This is beneficial for two primary reasons. First, your research project is article length. Including articles in your secondary sources will provide you with models to work from. Second, authors often publish articles that turn into larger projects, giving you an opportunity to familiarize yourself with a broad number of authors on a given subject before delving into particular sources in more depth. You may also want to include book reviews in your research – these are an ideal way to introduce yourself to a body of literature on a given subject, particularly when thinking about the debates that tend to drive academic research.
3. Peruse primary sources. Many of the resources below, both in print and on-line, have troves of primary sources for research on the modern Middle East. See what’s out there – a topic you had never imagined might jump out and grab you! Once you have identified even a potential topic we can begin to discuss primary sources.

Resources

For journal articles on the Middle East, I suggest starting with the following databases, all of which are available via the Burling web site.

- [jstor](#)
- [EBSCO Historical Abstracts](#)
- [EBSCO Atla Religion](#)

Many of the primary sources in these three texts are drawn from larger works, a good number of which you can find in longer form elsewhere. These will serve as a way to get a sense of what’s out there. You can find them on reserve in Burling Library.

- [*Sources in the history of the modern Middle East*](#)
- [*The modern Middle East: a sourcebook for history*](#)
- [*The Arab-Israel reader: a documentary history of the Middle East conflict*](#)

These sites are available via Burling Library's database collection. They provide access to subject guides and/or sources regarding the history of the modern Middle East. You will also want to explore the on-line databases for newspapers as well, as the *Times of London* and the *New York Times* (among others) may prove helpful to you as well.

- Empire Online (<http://www.empire.amdigital.co.uk/>)
- Center for Research Libraries (<http://catalog.crl.edu/>)

The following sites are among the finest subject guides for Middle East studies prepared by research libraries across the country. You will notice that there is some duplication in the collections that these guides lead you to, suggesting that if you spend time perusing the guides themselves you will end up with a good sense of what is available. I am including links directly to the primary source section of the guides, but clicking on "home" for each of the guides will be helpful for more general research, too.

- University of Southern California Library:
(<http://libguides.usc.edu/content.php?pid=160514&sid=1357398>)
- University of Washington Library
(<http://guides.lib.washington.edu/content.php?pid=63215&sid=466023>)

The Nationalism Project is another on-line resource that may be of help to you. A collaborative effort among scholars from the US and Europe, it contains subject guides on nationalism (in general) as well as some Middle East-specific bibliographies.

- <http://www.nationalismproject.org/>

Finally, Fordham University's Internet History Sourcebooks Project provides a unique resource for research, serving as a clearinghouse of sorts for primary sources on a vast array of subjects. I am providing links to the Middle East specific material, but a more general perusal might benefit you, too.

- <http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/mod/modsbook54.asp>
- <http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/islam/islamsbook.asp>
- <http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/jewish/jewishbook.asp>