Islam, the Middle East, and the West

Mériam Belli
Classes: MWF 11am-12pm

Course description

This course aims to provide students with a general overview of basic themes and issues in Middle Eastern history from the rise of Islam to the present, with an emphasis on the encounters and exchanges between the “Middle East” (Southwest Asia and North Africa) and the “West” (Europe and the United States).

First, we will examine the period which stretches from the 7th century (C.E.) to the end of the Abbasid Empire under the Mongol invasions of the 13th century. This saw the emergence of a new religion, Islam, the Christianization of Europe, and the flourishing of a Mediterranean world and culture. Second, we will study the period—between the 13th and the 17th century—characterized by the height of Ottoman territorial expansion, the flourishing of Northern European powers, European ventures into Asia, and the conquest of the Americas, which all redefined the physical and intellectual boundaries of both “East” and “West.” Finally, we will analyze European intrusion into, competition with, and colonization of Middle Eastern societies after the 18th century—typified by Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt in 1798—and Middle Eastern responses to Western hegemony and to the new social, economic, and political developments of the 20th century.

Assignments

Class participation: 20%.

Oral participation in class: While regular attendance is required, I expect you to demonstrate that you have read and critically analyzed the material in preparation for lectures and class discussions.

The professor will lead the discussions for the first two weeks of class, after which students will be responsible for facilitating discussions. Students will sign up on the second week of class for at least one discussion during the semester (depending on the size of the class). Facilitators might want to: 1) present the material to be discussed and its author; 2) raise a few topics for discussion in relation to the week’s or the course’s overall themes; 3) situate the reading within a historiographical debate (and its various historical perspectives); 4) relate the historical topic under discussion with current events. Students will receive a grade with comments from the professor as well as comments from their peers (5 min. will be allotted at the end of each discussion for that purpose, peer comments will remain anonymous).

Papers: 50%.

- Reaction papers 10%: Unless otherwise noted on the syllabus, you will be expected to submit a 1-2 p. reaction paper or reading review (typed, double-spaced) on any aspect of the week’s reading (totaling 10 papers). There will be no reaction paper for the first week of class or during the weeks in which the essays are due. Reaction papers will receive a check mark (plus/minus). Students are allowed to skip one reaction paper over the course of the semester, but they will be expected to actively participate in/lead the class discussion.

- Short essay 15%: This essay (5-7 p.) of Amin Maalouf’s account of the crusades (partially discussed in class) will be due on September 27th (week 4). You will be responsible for researching the author, and discuss 1) the construction of his narrative; 2) the underlying premises of this historical interpretation. Paper guidelines will be delivered in class. No internet sources allowed.
- **Final essay** 25% (paper 20% and oral presentation of the essay 5%): Your final essay (8-10 p.) will be about Tayeb Salih’s novel, *Season of Migration to the North* (1969). See class handout for detailed description of essay requirements. A first draft (5 pages) of the essay is due on November 22nd. The final draft is due December 4th. No internet sources allowed. Oral presentations of the essay will be scheduled between the 4th and the 8th of December (you need to sign up in class at the beginning of the semester). Your oral presentation might not exceed 10 minutes.

Please note that late papers will lose 1 letter grade per day.

- **Final exam**: 25%.

  3 hour final exam. Single essay question and map (see below). During the last week of class, students will receive three broad-based essay questions covering the entire semester's work. On the scheduled exam date, you will be asked to respond to one of those questions.

  **Two map quizzes**: 5%.

  These quizzes will be straightforward. You will have one quiz on the second week of the semester (September 15) (modern Middle East states, capital cities, and rivers/seas), and one quiz at the end of the semester during the final exam (same as above plus demographic/population data).

**Texts:**

Amin Maalouf, *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes* (Schoken, 1989)—0805240047
Muhammad al-Saffar, *Disorienting Encounters: Travels of a Moroccan Scholar in France in 1845-1846* (University of California Press, 1992)—0520074629
Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* (Heinemann, 1991)—0435909746

Recommended reference/textbooks on reserve at the library:

Ira Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (2002)—an elaborate and extensive history that includes Sub-Saharan Africa and Far East Asia, from the incipience of Islam to the 20th century.

Please note that this syllabus is subject to modifications

**Week 1: Introduction**

No reaction paper.

September 6: Middle East, historiographical issues, and geography.


**Week 2: Overview. “Islamic Civilization”**


**Week 3: Islam in Europe: Andalusia**

September 20
September 22: Discussion: Maalouf, 1989: 82-158.

**Week 4: Europeans in Islamdom: The Crusades**

September 25: Student holiday, no classes
September 29: Discussion: Maalouf, 1989: 159-259 & epilogue, and discussion.

**Week 5: Europe and the Middle East: A Shared Renaissance**


**Week 6: Early Modern Age: The House of Osman and the Expansion of the West**

October 9: Columbus Day. Vacation

**Week 7: The Middle East in the Age of Napoleon’s Invasion**

October 18: Film (proj.): Youssef Chahine, *Adieu, Bonaparte!* (Egypt/France, 1985—113 min.)—selection
October 20: Discussion: Matar, 2003: ch. 3 [113-195].

**Week 8: Islam and the Middle East in European Thought**


**Week 9: Empires, Race, and Modernity**

**Week 10: When Turkey Went West: From Tanzimat to Atatürk**

Mustafa Kemal, excerpt.
November 10: Veteran’s Day, Holiday

**Week 11: Resistance and Independence**

November 15: Film (proj.): Chahine, Salah al-Din the Victorious (1964, 180 min.) (or Nasser 56)—selection.

**Week 12: Migrations**

November 22: Discussion: Salih, 1991: 70-169 (end—and first draft of final essay due)
November 24: Thanksgiving vacation

**Week 13: Islamic Revolution, Terrorism, and Us**


**Week 14: Final essays & oral presentations**

**Final essays** (due 12/4) and December 4, 6, and 8: Students’ presentations

**FINAL EXAMINATION**

DATE & TIME TBA