

**HIST 3950/001: Mideast Jews in Modern Times**  
**TR 9:00-10:15am, Copeland Hall 246**  
**Professor: Dr. Yaron Ayalon, [yayalon@ou.edu](mailto:yayalon@ou.edu)**  
Office hours: Tuesday, 2:45-4:45pm, Hester Hall 132

The expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 caused Sephardi (Spanish) communities to disperse across Europe and the Ottoman Empire, where they established numerous new congregations. For many historians of Mediterranean or Ottoman Jewry, the expulsion was a watershed in Jewish history that marked the beginning of the modern era. For others, focused on Middle Eastern communities, the Ottoman conquest of the Arab lands in 1516-17 was the critical moment. Yet others believe that no significant changes took place in Sephardic/Mediterranean/Middle Eastern communities until the late eighteenth century.

Aiming to survey the history of Middle Eastern Jews in the modern period, this course will begin with a brief discussion of the formative middle ages, which in many ways defined and shaped Jewish practices and customs for centuries to come. We will then move on to the Ottoman period and the transformation of the eastern Mediterranean Jewish world into a Sephardi-dominated one, in language and customs. The second half of the semester will be devoted to the last two centuries, with emphasis on the changes Jewish communities in the Middle East experienced with the emergence of Zionism and the immigration to the State of Israel.

Previous knowledge about Jewish history, the Middle East, or Islam is helpful, but not required. Sufficient background will be given on the first week, and throughout the course, in the weekly readings and during lectures.

**Requirements:**

1. Attendance – you are expected to show up to all classes. I treat our classes as if they were a personal appointment with each one of you, and expect you to do the same. If you cannot come to class for whatever reason, please e-mail me *in advance* to let me know about it. I do not check attendance on a regular basis. However, if you miss enough classes for me to notice, it will seriously affect your grade, to the extent that you might not be able to earn a passing grade for the course. Attendance is your responsibility, and I will issue no warnings to let you know that you have missed too many classes.

Naturally, special circumstances sometimes require us to miss a class. If you believe this is your case, please come see me and we'll work something out.

2. Course assignments – these consist primarily of readings (see schedule below). Some other tasks may be assigned from time to time. You are expected to complete all the relevant assignments for each class. For some of the texts, I will post questions and comments on D2L, which you will be expected to refer to in class. Checking D2L for updates is your responsibility.

3. Participation – this course will consist primarily of class discussions. You are expected to come to class prepared, having read the assigned texts and with comments and questions to share with all of us. You should be able to offer some meaningful contribution to class discussion (staying silent or saying “yes, I agree” from time to time won’t do). See also # 2 above.
4. Papers: you will write two papers throughout this course:
  - a. Due in class on Thursday, 3/4, the first paper will be your answer to one of two questions given in class two weeks prior to the deadline. Maximum length of the first paper will be 4 double-spaced pages typed in Times New Roman font size 12.
  - b. Due on 5/14, the second/final will be a short research paper on a topic of your choice and my approval, that is related to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Maximum length of the final paper will be 10 double-spaced pages typed in Times New Roman font size 12.

More information on the papers and specific requirements and expectations will be given in due course.

### **Grading:**

There will be a total of 500 points for the class, distributed in the following manner:

Attendance and Participation – 25% (125pts, minimum 90)

Midterm paper – 25% (125pts, minimum 65)

Final paper – 50% (250pts, minimum 135)

Minimum points are the number of points you must earn in each section independently to get a passing grade for this class. One section cannot compensate for another – you *must* meet *at least* the minimum requirement for each part, as mentioned above, to pass the course.

Your final grade will be derived from the number of points you have earned, according to the following key: 455-500: A; 390-454: B; 345-389: C; 300-344: D; less than 300: F.

No incomplete, withdrawn, or satisfactory grades will be issued for this course.

**Bonus points:** Throughout the semester, you may earn bonus points by attending a Middle East related event and writing a short (no more than one page, double spaced, Times New Roman font size 12) report about it – 5 pts per event. You are obviously encouraged to participate in those events regardless. A list of events will be published on D2L, so make sure you check our course’s website often.

**Disability accommodation:** Students who have a disability that prevents them from fully demonstrating their academic skills should contact me during office hours to discuss arrangements that can ensure full participation and facilitate their learning experience.

**Academic integrity:** Students who are not familiar with the Student Code of Conduct should read it closely and uphold the obligations, rights, and procedures regarding violations of academic integrity. Please see <http://www.ou.edu/provost/integrity-rights/>

**Readings:** There are two required purchases, available from bookstores around campus and from online retailers, such as Amazon.com.

Norman Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979)

Norman Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1991)

Copies of these two books have been placed on 2-hour reserve at Bizzell Library. In the schedule below, assignments from these two books appear as, *Arab Lands* or *Modern Times*.

Readings from other sources will be available via the course's website on D2L in PDF form. I will post the files in a message on D2L every week. Sometimes, I will also post relevant questions that you should think about while reading. It is your responsibility to constantly check D2L for changes and announcements.

Some of the books mentioned in the schedule below are also available at Bizzell library (just look them up in the catalog). If you prefer to read from the books themselves instead of the PDFs, please do so in the library and do not check out the books, so others may have access to them as well.

Reading assignments that appear under each class should be read *in preparation for* that class. This preparation includes looking up information about the author of each text, and any other places, organizations, or people mentioned in the text that you have not heard of before. You may use the internet or any other credible source you like to dig out that information. Please note that a text or an argument is generally meaningless if we don't know anything about the author. Thus knowledge about the texts we read will be assumed when they are discussed in class.

If there's no reading assigned, it might just be your lucky day.

## Course Schedule

Tuesday 1/19 – Introduction

Thursday 1/21 – The background: Judaism, the Middle East, and Islam

Jonathan Barkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 61-90.

Tuesday 1/26 – Muhammad and the Jews of Arabia

*Arab Lands*, pp. 3-21, 113-151

Thursday 1/28 – The Rise of Classical Jewish & Islamic Civilization

*Arab Lands*, pp. 22-39; 152-164; 169-170; 189-191

Tuesday (2/2) – Jews in Islamic lands in the High Middle Ages

*Arab Lands*, pp. 40-63; 171-188; 192-197; 200-225

Thursday (2/4) – Communal social organization in the Geniza period

Mark Cohen, *Poverty and Charity in the Jewish Community of Medieval Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 189-242

Tuesday (2/9) – The Decline of the Later Middle Ages

*Arab Lands*, pp. 64-87; 262-287

Thursday (2/11) – Who were the Sephardim?

Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry: a History of the Judeo-Spanish Community, 14<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), prologue

Haim Beinart, “The expulsion from Spain: Causes and Results” in: Beinart (ed.), *The Sephardic Legacy* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1992), vol. 2, pp. 11-42

Tuesday (2/16) – Transformation of Jewish communities in the Ottoman Empire

*Arab Lands*, pp. 87-94; 289-302

Benbassa and Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry*, 1-35

Thursday (2/18) – Communal life in Ottoman cities

Joseph Hacker, “The Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century” in: *The Sephardic Legacy*, vol. 2, pp. 109-33

Jacob Barnai, “The Jews of the Ottoman Empire in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries” in: *The Sephardic Legacy*, vol. 2, pp. 134-65

Tuesday (2/23) – New approaches to communal organization in Middle Eastern Communities

Uriel Simonsohn, “Overlapping jurisdictions: confessional boundaries and judicial choice among Christians and Jews under early Muslim rule,” (PhD Dissertation, Princeton University, 2008), pp. 9-18

Yaron Ayalon, “Plagues, famines, earthquakes: the Jews of Ottoman Syria and natural disasters” (PhD Dissertation, Princeton University, 2009), pp. 73-87, 90-100

Thursday (2/25) – The rise of messianic beliefs

Yaron Ayalon, “Berab, Jacob”; Yaron Ben Naeh, “Caro, Joseph ben Ephraim”; Samuel Morell, “Ibn Abi Zimra, David (Radbaz)”; and Jacob Barnai, “Benveniste, Hayyim Ben Israel” in: Norman Stillman (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World* (Leiden: Brill, 2010)

Gershom Scholem and Moshe Idel, “Luria, Isaac ben Solomon” in: *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, vol. 13, pp. 262-267

Gershom Scholem, “Vital, Hayyim ben Joseph” in: *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, vol. 20, pp. 546-549

Tuesday (3/2) – The Shabbetai Sevi episode

Jacob Barnai, “Shabbetai Sevi (Sabbatai Sevi)” in: Norman Stillman (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

Gershom Scholem, "Nathan of Gaza" in: *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, vol. 15, pp. 15-17

Thursday (3/4) – Jews in Ottoman Palestine, the 18<sup>th</sup> century

Jacob Barnai, *The Jews in Palestine in the Eighteenth Century* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1992), pp. 109-146

Tuesday (3/9) and Thursday (3/11) – no class

Tuesday (3/16) and Thursday (3/18) – spring break, no class

Tuesday (3/23) – Jews in the Ottoman Mediterranean commercial world

Daniel Goffman, "Jews in early modern Ottoman commerce," Avigdor Levy (ed.), *Jews, Turks, Ottomans: A Shared History, Fifteenth through the Twentieth Century* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002), pp. 15-34.

Benbassa and Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry*, pp. 36-49

Thursday (3/25) – Mideast Jews face modernity

*Arab Lands*, pp. 95-101; 324-339; 347-367  
*Modern Times*, pp. 3-26; 183-198

Tuesday (3/30) – Social, economic, and cultural transformations in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

*Modern Times*, pp. 27-46; 199-200; 202-205; 241-249

Thursday (4/1) – Jews in Palestine in the nineteenth century; early national consciousness

Ben Halpern and Jehuda Reinharz, *Zionism and the Creation of a New Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 46-89

Tuesday (4/6) – The First World War and its aftermath

*Modern Times*, pp. 47-64; 263-79; 291-302.

Thursday (4/8) – Mideast Jews and Zionism

*Modern Times*, pp. 65-91; 305-355

Tuesday (4/13) – Mideast Jews in the 1930s and 1940s

*Modern Times*, pp. 93-112; 357-404

Thursday (4/15) – The Second World War and its aftermath

*Modern Times*, pp. 113-140; 405-460

Tuesday (4/20) – Dissolution of Mideast Jewry after WWII

*Modern Times*, pp. 141-176; 504-510; 515-529

Sasson Somekh, *Baghdad, Yesterday: the Making of an Arab Jew* (Jerusalem: Ibis Editions, 2007), 92-99, 130-136, 145-175, 181-186

Thursday (4/22) – Mideast Jews in the Diaspora

Walter Zenner, *A Global Community: The Jews from Aleppo, Syria* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), pp. 127-154

Tuesday (4/27) – Those who were left behind

*Modern Times*, pp. 177-180

“Jews in Syria,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 2 (1973), 4, pp. 134-139.

Sasha Troy, “The last three Jews of Qamishli,” *The Jerusalem Post* 9 February 2006

Thursday (4/29) – Mideast Jews in Israel, 1950s

Eli Amir, *Scapegoat: a Novel* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), pp. 9-52

Efraim Ben-Zadok, “Oriental Jews in the development towns: ethnicity, economic development, budgets, and politics” in: Ben-Zadok (ed.), *Local Communities and the Israeli Polity: Conflict of Values and Interests* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), pp. 91-122

Tuesday (5/4) – Sephardi/Mizrahi Jews in Israel, 1970s and 1980s

Sam N. Lehman-Wilzig, *Wildfire: Grassroots Revolts in Israel in the Post-Socialist Era* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), pp. 33-55

Daniel Elazar, *The Other Jews: the Sephardim Today* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), pp. 41-69

Thursday (5/6) – Sephardi/Mizrahi Jews reinvented: Shas

Graham Usher, “The enigmas of Shas,” *Middle East Report* 207 (Summer 1998), pp. 34-6

Nissim Leon, ““Zikui Harabim”: Ovadia Yosef’s approach toward religious activism and his place in the Haredi movement within Mizrahi Jewry,” Peter Medding (ed.), *Sephardic Jewry and Mizrahi Jews* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 150-168

David Lehmann and Batia Siebzehner, *Remaking of Israeli Judaism: The Challenge of Shas* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2006), pp. 169-202

Friday (5/14), 8-10 am – conclusion