

MIDEAST MINORITIES IN MODERN TIMES

(History 3950-002)

Instructor: Professor Stillman
Teaching Assistant: Mr. Sterling Fluharty

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General Introduction

Perhaps no other region has been the focus of more attention today than the Muslim world, particularly the Middle East. It is an area of tremendous geopolitical importance because some of the greatest reserves of the petroleum are found there. But it is also an area of profound malaise and turmoil which some observers believe to be one side in an ongoing “clash of civilizations.” For the past fourteen hundred years, ever since its conquest by the Arabs, the Middle East (and for our purposes, “the Middle East” will be taken to include all of the lands stretching from North Africa in the West to Iran in the East) has been the heartland of the Islamic world. Although eventually the majority of people living in this world converted to Islam, there remained important minorities of non-Muslims, indigenous Christians, Jews, and in Iran some Zoroastrians, who though not equal in status to the dominant Muslims, nevertheless were shown what was for pre-modern times a considerable degree of tolerance. At times (and the first part of the modern era was one such time), these minorities played a significant role in the socioeconomic life of the region and were part its distinctive cultural mosaic. In many places they were more open to the modernizing forces that were penetrating their societies than was the Muslim majority, and often they acted as vectors of modernity themselves. But their very success and their association with external forces transforming their region contributed to undermining the foundations of their existence. Most of the Jews have fled the Muslim countries, many migrating in the mid-twentieth century within the Middle East to the new State of Israel. Many Middle Eastern Christians emigrated abroad over a much longer period of time and are continuing to do so now in ever larger numbers. Their story forms an integral part of the history of the region. Knowing that story will contribute – it is hoped – to a better understanding of the complexity of the Middle East today.

In order to better examine some of the aspects of the Middle Eastern Christian and Jewish minorities’ confrontation with modernity during the 19th and 20th centuries, we shall draw upon the insights of research in History, Anthropology, Political Science, and Ethnography. Some of the assigned readings will reflect these different disciplines. Among the questions we shall be examining are: What are the varying degrees of impact caused by contact with the modern world upon different Middle Eastern communities and specific groups within communities? What were the media for change? What were the different responses of various elements within the Christian and Jewish communities to modernity? Because the minorities lived within the Islamic world, we shall also be making comparative observations with the majority Muslim society. Furthermore, since modernization is a global phenomenon which has been a major subject of inquiry to social science, we shall take a few comparative looks at other groups in different modernizing societies.

Class Format

Classes will meet on Tuesday and Thursday in PHSC 321 from 10:30-11:45. The classes will combine lecture with discussion. Students should feel free to ask questions of the instructor.

He will feel free to ask questions of them. Regular attendance is highly recommended on two counts: (1) it will greatly help in passing the exams, and (2) it will be taken into account where the exam grades average on the border between two grade levels. Keeping up with the reading assignments should make the lectures more relevant, the discussion more intelligent, and participation much easier. Please note that the lecture topics listed below do not necessarily equal a single class (although most do, approximately). Some topics may run for three or four classes.

Papers, Exams and Grades

Grades will be determined upon the basis of:

- in-class midterm on Tuesday, February 24th.
- a book report (approx. 3-5 pages) due on Thursday, February 19th
- a research paper (approx. 10 pages), Thursday, April 22nd
- the regularly scheduled final during exam week

The two exams and the term paper will each count for approximately 30% of the course grade, and the book report will count for approximately 10%. (I say approximately since additional consideration will be given to participation, marked improvement on the research paper and final exam over the midterm and book report. Students are urged to see Professor Stillman as early as possible during the term to discuss topics for the book report and research paper and to get his approval. Both Professor Stillman and Mr. Fluharty will be happy to meet with students for advice and consultation during the writing process.

Office Hours

Students are cordially invited to take advantage of office hours in addition to the time that they must come to discuss their paper. Office hours provide an excellent opportunity for us to get to know you individually. Both our offices are in the Judaic Studies suite, DAHT 305d-f. Professor Stillman's office hours are: Thursdays 12:00-1:00 and Wednesdays 10:30-12:00 ; and Mr. Fluharty's are: Tuesdays 12:00-1:00 and Wednesdays 3:00-4:00. One can also meet with either of them by special appointment in addition to the regular hours.

Required Books

Benjamin Braude & Bernard Lewis (eds.), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*. 2 vols. (Holmes & Meier: New York & London, 1982)
[On reserve in Bizzell Library: 2-hour/overnight reserve]

Bernard Lewis, *The Shaping of the Modern Middle East* (Oxford University Press: New York & Oxford, 1994)

Bernard Lewis, *Multiple Identities of the Middle East*. (New York: Schocken Books, 2001)

Mordechai Nisan, *Minorities in the Middle East: A History of Struggle and Self-Expression*. 2nd ed. (McFarland: Jefferson, NC & London, 2002)

Norman A. Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times*. 2nd ed. (JPS: Philadelphia, 2003)

Norman A. Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Source Book I The Jews of Arab Land* (JPS: Philadelphia, 1979)

[On reserve in Bizzell Library: 2-hour/overnight reserve and also available as an optional purchase at the bookstore]

In addition to the assigned readings in the required books, there will be several handouts of journal articles and readings from reference books such as the *Encyclopedia of the Modern Middle East*, the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, and *Encyclopaedia of Judaica* which may be found in the Library Reference Section.