

LITR 480: Fantasies of the Holy Land

Professor: Martin B. Shichtman

Office hours: MW 10:00-11:00; 12:15-1:00; F 12:00-1:00; and by appointment

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“Israel is a place where the wonder of the past slams daily into the bitter reality of the present”—Kathy Reichs, *Cross Bones*

“The state [of Israel] is holy because it represents the realization of the prophets and the messianic process”—Aviezer Ravitzky

Course Description:

While Americans have long been aware of the combustible politics of the Middle East, both contributing to the instability by providing resources—including weaponry—to participants, and, yet, also engaging, at the very highest political levels, in attempts to bring about resolution to some of the hostilities, we have been largely insulated—aside from the price of petroleum—from the impact of conflicts. On September 11, 2001, with the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, with the loss of nearly 3000 American lives, the United States was directly drawn into the turmoil. While most Americans have taken positions on U.S. involvement in the Middle East, few have had opportunity to consider the discourses that have supported the history of violence, few have addressed the significance, for instance, of President George W. Bush referring to our military effort as a “crusade” or of Osama Bin Laden’s insistence on addressing his antagonists as “Jews and Crusaders.” “Fantasies of the Holy Land” asks students to consider why, for almost a century, the three “peoples of the book,” Jews, Christians, and Muslims, have engaged in conflict over the area now called Israel. How has the area we now call Israel become the focus of desires, in very distinct ways, in the collective consciousnesses of Jews, Christians, and Muslims? How are these desires described? What are the cultural forces that have been mobilized to create such desires? The course, which will take a particularly close look at the various claims to the city of Jerusalem, asks students to think about how religious, racial, and political identities are fashioned and how these identities become, often enough, inextricably associated with territory. Finally, students will be asked to consider what are the values of fantasies of the Holy Land and what are the consequences.

“Fantasies of the Holy Land” asks students to think about narratives forging identification with Israel. They will first address religious admonitions making claim to territory and consider, as well, the implications of religious sites for Jews, Christians, and Muslims. They will discuss how the Holy Land has been mapped from Biblical times, through the time of the Crusades, to the present and how such mapping has influenced perceptions of the Holy Land as existing simultaneously on terrestrial and transcendent planes. The course will then address the Crusades and the self-fashionings that brought the Christian West to war with Islam—and the sorts of “collateral damage” endured by Jews. Finally,

students will focus on narratives concerned with the identity—as well as the survival of—the state of Israel, as it functions both as physical space and as an idea open to the contestation of Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

Written Texts:

Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: The 4000 Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Ballantine, 1994)
Modern Hebrew Literature, ed. Robert Alter (Berhman House, 1975)
The Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature, ed. Salma Jayyusi (Columbia University Press, 1994)
Joe Sacco and Edward Said, *Palestine* (Fantagraphics Books, 2002)
“Jerusalem,” in *The Seventh Day: Soldiers Talk about the Six-Day War* (Scribners, 1970)
The Oxford Illustrated History of the Crusades, ed. Jonathan Riley Smith (Oxford University Press, 2001)
U.N. Security Council Resolution 242
Israel’s Declaration of Independence
Palestinian National Charter
The Hamas Charter, 1988

Films:

Terry Jones’ The Crusades
El Naser Salah el Dine, dir. Youssef Chahine
The Crusaders, dir. Dominique Othenin-Girard
Kingdom of Heaven, dir. Ridley Scott
Paradise Now, dir. Hany Abu-Assad

Course Calendar:

Weeks 1-2 RELIGIOUS IMPERATIVE
The religious literatures Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all recognize, to a greater or lesser degree, the territory that is now the state of Israel as significant to religious identity. In this portion of the class we will discuss how the three “religions of the book” have imagined the Holy Land, their role in it, and their role in claiming it. We will consider various holy sites in the city of Jerusalem and discuss how structures serve to assist in entwining religious identity with geography.

Readings:

Selections from Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: The 4000 Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*

Some Topics for Discussion:

What is the religious basis for the Jewish claim to the Holy Land?
What is the religious basis for the Christian claim to the Holy Land?
What is the religious basis for the Islamic claim to the Holy Land?

What are the religious sites that create and complicate competing claims to the Holy Land?

How does the “allegorical function” of the Holy Land function to create and complicate competing claims?

Week 3

MAPPING DESIRE

This portion of the course will focus on how geographic desire is reckoned graphically. The class will look at maps ranging from the Christian Middle Ages, where Jerusalem is most often depicted as the center of the world, through modern maps—from 1948 to the present—with their politically conflicting presentations of Israel/Palestine.

Readings:

Selections from *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Crusades*
Maps of Israel 1948, 1967, 1974, 1994-2000, 2006

Some Topics for Discussion:

What are the kinds of “imagined communities” that can be illustrated on a map?

How do maps assist in configuring groups’ religious, ethnic, and political ambitions?

How do maps contribute toward notions of nationhood?

How are identities determined by what is included on a map? By what is left off?

Weeks 4-7

THE CRUSADES

From the eleventh through the thirteenth centuries, European Christianity embarked on a number of military campaigns into the Islamic East. These campaigns were conducted largely for religious reasons—to conquer Jerusalem and to re-claim a number of Christian relics—but political and economic factors also played significantly into the equation. While the Crusades offered both Christians and Muslims—and, to a much lesser extent, Jews—a number of opportunities for mutual benefit, their destructiveness resonates even today. This portion of the course will consider what was at stake in the Crusades and what are their implications.

Readings:

Selections from *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Crusades*

Films:

Terry Jones’ The Crusades

El Naser Salah el Dine, dir. Youssef Chahine

The Crusaders, dir. Dominique Othenin-Girard

Kingdom of Heaven, dir. Ridley Scott

Some Topics for Discussion:

What were the reasons for the Crusades?

In what ways do the Crusades serve to reconfigure the culture of the Christian West?

In what ways do the Crusades serve to reconfigure the culture of the Islamic East?

Why do the discourses of the Crusades continue to resonate in the twenty first century?

Weeks 8-15 IMAGINING ISRAEL

With the creation of the Jewish State of Israel in 1948, the world has entered into a continuous debate—and an apparently unceasing cycle of violence—concerning both access to and control of the Holy Land. Ancient feuds have become revived as Jews, Christians, and Muslims attempt to define themselves in reference to a small space (about the size of Rhode Island) in the Middle East. But even amidst the often horrific bloodshed, there have been attempts on all sides to re-imagine the Holy Land as a place of peace. In this final portion of the course, we will consider fantasies of the Holy Land that have served to divide us, and those that may some day bring us together.

Readings:

Joe Sacco and Edward Said, *Palestine*

Selections from *Modern Hebrew Literature*, ed. Robert Alter (Berhman House, 1975)

Selections from *The Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature*, ed. Salma Jayyusi (Columbia University Press, 1994)

“Jerusalem,” in *The Seventh Day: Soldiers Talk about the Six-Day War* (Scribners, 1970)

U.N. Security Council Resolution 242

Israel’s Declaration of Independence

Palestinian National Charter

The Hamas Charter, 1988

Film:

Paradise Now, dir. Hany Abu-Assad

Some Topics for Discussion:

What is at stake in the founding of Israel as a Jewish State?

How have Israeli authors expressed their support and discomfort with imagining themselves as members of a Jewish State?
What does the existence of a Jewish state mean to Christians?
How have Palestinians negotiated their responses to the establishment of a Jewish state?
How does a Jewish state stand in opposition to Islamic identity?
Is there any hope for peaceful co-existence in the Holy Land?
How might a peace in the Holy Land be configured?

Assignments and Evaluation:

“Fantasies of the Holy Land” is a lecture/discussion class. Students will be required to attend lectures, read the books, see the films, and participate in classroom discussions. Your learning will be tested by two examinations and two short written essays (each approximately 5-7 pages in length). The examinations will cover readings, films, and materials discussed in class. Paper topics will be provided at least two weeks before due dates and will ask for an expansion on classroom discussion and for students to make arguments of their own about some of the material. Grades will be computed thusly:

Examinations	25% each
Essays	25% each