HIS 266-01

Modern History of the Middle East and North Africa

**Instructor:** Adey Almohsen, PhD  
**Location:** Humanities and Social Studies Center N3110  
**Meetings:** Tue. 10:00 am – 11:50 am; Thu. 10:00 am – 10:50 am  
**Office hours:** Tue. 1:00 pm – 2:15 pm; Thu. 12:00 – 1:15 pm (N3158 HSSC)

**Course description:**  
The region of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is home to a diversity of peoples, religions, cultures, languages, literatures, and stories. The region as we know it today is the product of successive dynasties, empires, revolutions, and military coups. This course offers an introductory survey of the MENA region, covering aspects of its political history, cultural history, economic history, and intellectual history. Given that this is an introductory course taught over a single semester, our coverage will focus on the Arabic-speaking nations of MENA alongside important examples from Iran, Turkey, and Afghanistan. The course proceeds chronologically, beginning with the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in the late nineteenth century and closing at the teens of the twenty-first century with the Arab Spring. Along this chronology, we will survey thematic topics such as orientalism, imperialism, and nationalism among others. Moreover, we will learn how history is read and interpreted. We will read primary sources in the form of treaties, speeches, memoirs, or newspaper clippings alongside (or against) secondary sources and academic analyses. Foreign primary sources from diplomats or imperial officers will be included, however, the course privileges sources from the women and men of the MENA region, examining their takes on local events and developments.

**Course aims:**  
- Understanding the political and intellectual forces and trends that shaped MENA history.  
- Connecting historical knowledge to present-day issues and contexts in a critical manner.  
- Making sense of the nuances of historical events through primary-sources.  
- Demonstrating the importance of interdisciplinary sources for historical study.  
- Deconstructing narratives about MENA & its peoples through historical and interdisciplinary study.  
- Learning how to work productively in small groups to develop an argument.  
- Engaging meaningfully in the classroom with the instructor and with peers.  
- Conducting sound historical analysis by deferring to a mix of primary and secondary-sources.

**Grade breakdown:**  
- Regular attendance 15%  
- Map quiz 5%  
- In-class team primary source exercises 20% (two times)  
- Manifesto exercises (1-3 pages) 30% (three times)  
- Reflection Essay (6-9 pages) 30%  

**Total Grade 100%**
Important dates:
Sep. 7          Map quiz
Sep. 21         Primary source exercise I (Report due: Sep. 22, 10 pm)
Oct. 14         Primary source exercise II (Report due: Oct. 15, 10 pm)
Oct. 28         First manifesto due (10 pm)
Nov. 18         Second manifesto due (10 pm)
Dec. 9          Third manifesto due (10 pm)
Dec. 17         Reflection essay due (10 pm)

Readings and texts:
Weekly course readings range between 50-90 pages. You are expected to prepare all readings before
class (highlighted in yellow). Suggested readings are not mandatory, however, they will be discussed
and analyzed during the lecture component of the class. The course requires only one textbook
(Rogan, 2017) to cut down student costs. All assigned readings and primary sources will be available
on-line in the course’s OneDrive.

Primary source collections:
Below are texts and websites which include primary sources covering the modern history of the
MENA region. They include treaties, declarations, and other documents of a political or diplomatic
nature. A couple are already on reserve at Grinnell’s Burling Library.

- Amin, Fortna, and Frierson, *The Modern Middle East: A Sourcebook for History* (Oxford University
  Press, 2006).

Regular attendance (15%):
Class attendance is the difference between failing a class and excelling in it. In the lectures, I will of-
er insights that go beyond assigned readings. I will also contextualize arguments raised by the
different authors and relate them to the present. In addition, student discussions bring to the class
interesting perspectives that cannot be gained by a simple reading of assigned texts. That said, I am
aware that some students are less shy than others, therefore, this grade is geared more toward showing
up to class, taking notes, and being attentive as opposed to verbal participation—although the
latter is always encouraged.
Map quiz (5%):
It is crucial to know where the different countries and capitals mentioned in this course are located geographically. Familiarize yourself with the map of the Middle East and North Africa and be sure to differentiate between the states of Iraq and Iran, or, between Libya’s Tripoli and Lebanon’s Tripoli.

In-class team primary source exercises (20%):
Students will be divided into teams and will be tasked to read and analyze primary source documents selected by the instructor. The analyses are meant to respond to a question or problematic posed by the instructor. Teams are then expected to prepare a brief report (350-500 words) which lays out their analysis of the source. Reports are to be submitted by 10 pm to OneDrive on the day following the class exercise.

Manifestos (30%):
This is an individual assignment. You will be tasked to assume the position of a thinker, political party, or terrorist organization—real or imagined. You will produce a text of 1–3 pages (300–900 words) which lays out the thought of your chosen individual or group in a language that is both historically accurate, ideologically coherent, and philosophically relevant to the worldview of your chosen individual or group. For example, if you opt to be an Islamist thinker from the 1960s, it would be unreasonable to call for secularizing society and it would be ahistorical to advocate for suicide bombings (which are the product of a later period).

Reflection essay (30%):
By Sep. 30, I will post to OneDrive a document with several topics/themes/questions, which students will respond to thoughtfully as well as critically in a reflective essay of 6–9 pages (1,800–3,000 words). Students should select one of these topics on or before October 29th. Students are expected to discuss their selected topic with the instructor during office hours. The instructor will help students formulate a thesis and direct them to relevant books or journal articles. This is not meant to be a research paper, but an essay—in the literal sense of the term: essayer—where students attempt to expand on one of the class themes by relying on assigned readings in addition to 2–3 external sources (primary and/or secondary). Essays are due on December 17th by 10 pm.

Important note:
Deadlines are final. Failure to submit an assignment on time equals failure in the assignment (i.e., a grade of zero). Missing 6 sessions (of the total 28) will result in a zero grade for attendance. Missing 7 or more sessions will result in failing the course altogether. Accommodations will be made for students’ needs (cultural, religious, personal, or otherwise) and for dire or special circumstances upon contacting and informing the instructor well in-advance.

Writing Center:
Grinnell’s Writing, Reading, and Speaking Center supports students working on papers, projects, and presentations, as well as applications for internships, fellowships, and graduate school. In one-on-one sessions, students work with professional instructors to interpret readings, talk through ideas, choose and analyze evidence, develop and organize arguments, craft introductions and conclusions,
organize and revise whole drafts, rewrite sentences and paragraphs, plan presentations, and more. Instructors do not proofread papers, but they can teach you how to edit your own work effectively. For a link to the schedule and appointment system, search for “Writing Center” on grinnell.edu or Grinnell Share.

**Academic Difficulty and Advising:**
College academics are demanding, and it perfectly normal to experience difficulty from time to time. If you are experiencing academic difficulty in my class (or any other class for that matter), I encourage you to get in touch with me and/or your academic advisor. We can all help you take advantages of the many resources Grinnell offers you to resolve problems you may be experiencing in a class.

**Honor Policy:**
Grinnell College’s Academic Honesty Policy is to be found in the Student Handbook. It is the College’s expectation that students are aware of and meet the expectations expressed in this policy.

**Accommodations:**
I strive to create a fully inclusive classroom. Thus, I welcome individual students to approach me about distinctive learning needs. In particular, I encourage students with disabilities to have a conversation with me and disclose how our classroom or course activities could impact the disability and what accommodations would be essential to you. You will also need to have a conversation about and provide documentation of your disability to the Coordinator for Disability Resources, located on the ground level floor of Steiner Hall (641-269-3124).

**Policy on Lateness, Absence, Illness:**
I realize that circumstances can arise that are beyond your control, and I will be reasonable about such exceptional circumstances. But recurring episodes of lateness or unexcused absence will not be tolerated. Note that an excused absence is usually one that you have arranged with me in advance, not after the fact.

**Communication:**
You can always contact me by e-mail, but I don’t necessarily read e-mails after 5 pm and on weekends.
Week I: Syllabus and Introductions

Thu. Aug. 26, 2021
- No Readings

Week II: So, what exactly is the Middle East?

The course opens with a ‘pre-history’ of the modern MENA region, surveying the region’s history since antiquity into the rise of Christianity and later Islam and its successive dynasties. We will also try to understand how to use and interpret sources when studying history.

- Clancy-Smith and Smith: viii-xi.

Week III: The ‘Orient’ as a subject of knowledge

This week we will consider the following question: how did the Middle East’s geographic neighbors conceive of it in civilizational terms? Were the Middle East and North Africa—in their complexities—reduced to the ‘other’ of a European self? We will explore this history of orientalism and its problematics.

Tue. Sep. 7, 2021

Map quiz (5%)  

Thu. Sep. 9, 2021
Week IV: Modernities

Here, our historical survey resumes, picking up around the late 19th century, where we will explore how different parts of the MENA region responded to the challenges posed by European modernity.

Tue. Sep. 14, 2021
- Clancy-Smith and Smith: 25–29 [primary source: Napoleon’s appeal in Arabic to Egyptians and Response to Napoleon by ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Jabarti (1754–1822)].

Thu. Sep. 16, 2021
- Rogan: 85–108.

Week V: Colonialism and Global War

We will discuss the legacy of European colonial rule in North Africa and the Middle East into the early 20th century, exploring indigenous reactions and the budding of nationalist movements.

Tue. Sep. 21, 2021
- Abrahamian: 35–64.
- Clancy-Smith and Smith: 54–6 [primary source: Iranian Oil Concessions].

In-class teamwork: primary source exercise I (10%)
- Selections from *An Imam in Paris* by Rifā‘ah at-Ṭahṭawī (1801–73).

Thu. Sep. 23, 2021
- Rogan: 147–74.

Weeks VI and VII: Redrawing of Borders and Displacement of Peoples

These two weeks will focus on the First World War and its brutal outcomes in the MENA region: from genocide in Armenia to the creation of British and French mandates.

Tue. Sep. 28, 2021
- Clancy-Smith and Smith: 109–113 [primary source: *The Armenian Question*]

**Class trip to Burling Library exploring Grinnell College’s archives (extra 3% !!!)**

**Thu. Sep. 30, 2021**

**Tue. Oct. 5, 2021**
- 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement.
- Clancy-Smith and Smith: 113–7 [Primary source: ‘Promises, Promises’].

**Thu. Oct. 7, 2021**
- Rogan, 211–246.

**Week VIII: The Arab-Israeli Conflict**

*This week will investigate the historical roots of the conflict in late Ottoman and Mandatory Palestine between the Palestinian Arab population and the incoming waves of Jewish migrants fleeing persecution in Europe and Russia and seeking to establish an independent society (and a state, eventually).*

**Tue. Oct. 12, 2021**
- Rogan: 247–76.
- Clancy-Smith and Smith: 118 [primary source: 1917 Balfour Declaration]

**Thu. Oct. 14, 2021**
**In-class teamwork: primary source exercise II (10%)**
- Herzl, *A Solution to the Jewish Question* (1896) [primary source]
- Rabinowitz, *Zionists Are Not Our Saviors* (1900) [primary source]
- Jabotinsky, *What the Zionist-Revisionists Want* (1926) [primary source]

**Preparation for first manifesto**
Week IX: NO CLASSES, FALL BREAK

Tue. Oct 19, 2021
Thu. Oct. 21, 2021

Week X: The Second World War and Its Intellectual Upshots

The Second World War and the establishment of Israel in 1948 unleashed a wave of intellectual reassessments that sought to break with the Arab past. Many thinkers hoped for liberation from both the bonds of imperial legacy and the tyranny of the present. We will assess the promises and failures of these projects.

Tue. Oct. 26, 2021
* Class will be on-line over Cisco WebEx (link to be provided later).

Thu. Oct. 28, 2021
* In lieu of class meeting, watch the following movie independently or with your classmates:

First manifesto (10%) due by Thu. Oct. 28, 2021 (10 pm latest)

Week XI and XII: The Long Sixties

This week looks at the causes and effects of the 1967 Six-Day War. Like 1948 before it, Arab defeat in 1967 stirred serious intellectual and political strife in the region and gave rise to a defiant Palestinian national movement and a new left in the Arab world.

Tue. Nov. 2, 2021

Thu. Nov. 4, 2021
  - Selections from *Arab Women are Liars, Hypocrites, and Losers* (1966) by Thurayà Malḥas (1925–2013).

Preparation for second manifesto
Tue. Nov. 9, 2021

Thu. Nov. 11, 2021

Week XIII: Civil War and Revolution
This week focuses on the 1970s in the Middle East and North Africa, focusing on two crucial events that determined the region’s future for many decades after: the Lebanese Civil War and the Iranian Revolution.

Tue. Nov. 16, 2021
- Abrahamian: 159–204.

Thu. Nov. 18, 2021

Second manifesto (10%) due by Thu. Nov. 18, 2021 (10 pm latest)

Week XIV and XV: Political Islam
We begin here with the Soviet-Afghan War and assess its repercussions on the culture and politics of the Middle East and trace the roots of violent Islamist movements against the corruption of Arab republics and monarchies.

Tue. Nov. 23, 2021
- Rogan: 397–438.

Thu. Nov. 25, 2021 (Thanksgiving – No class)

Tue. Nov. 30, 2021
Thu. Dec. 02, 2021
- Selections from the writings of Sayyed Qutb (1906–66) [primary source].

Preparation for third manifesto

Week XVI: A New Middle East?
We will conclude our historical survey, looking at the late 20th century, 9/11, 2003 US occupation of Iraq, and the ongoing Arab Spring.

Tue. Dec. 07, 2021
- Rogan: 439–82, 483–512.

Thu. Dec. 09, 2021
- Film viewing: el-Said, Ākher Ayām al-Madinah [In the Last Days of the City]. Egypt: Zero Production, 2016.

Third manifesto (10%) due by Thu. Dec. 9, 2021 (10 pm latest)

Reflection essay (30%) due by Fri. Dec. 17, 2021 (10 pm latest)