

Sephardic Jews in the Diaspora and Israel

HIST 385-006/MESAS 370-002/JS 370

MWF 12:50-1:40, Bowden Hall 118

Dr. Yaron Ayalon, yayalon@emory.edu

Office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 9:30-10:30, Bowden 217, or by appointment

Aiming to survey the history of Sephardic Jews, 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 move on to the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain, and then the Ottoman period and the transformation of the eastern Mediterranean Jewish world into a Sephardi-dominated one, in language and practices. Then we will discuss the changes Sephardi-Mizrahi communities experienced with the emergence of Zionism and the immigration to the State of Israel, where the Sephardim were a majority until the 1990s. We will devote the last third of the semester to the experiences of Sephardi-Mizrahi Jews in Israel.

This course has two goals: to teach you about the history, culture, and practices of Sephardi Jewry; and to make you better writers. To that effect, you will be writing several essays throughout this semester. This course fulfills Emory College's Continuing Writing Requirement.

Previous knowledge about Jewish history, the Middle East, or Islam is helpful, but not required. If you have no idea what some of the terms I use in the first paragraph above are, that is perfectly fine. Sufficient background will be given on the first week, and throughout the course, in the weekly readings and during lectures.

Grading:

The maximum number of points you may earn for this course is 1000. Grading will be distributed in the following manner (see below for explanation):

Attendance – 50pts

Participation – 150pts

Essays – 800pts (no final exam, read below)

Your final grade will be determined by your points balance as of 05/10/13, according to the following key: above 940 points: A; 900-939: A-; 860-899: B+; 820-859: B; 785-819: B-; 760-784: C+; 710-759: C; 690-709: C-; 660-689: D+; 600-659: D; less than 600: F.

If you are taking this class for pass/fail (satisfactory/unsatisfactory), you must reach at least 600 points *and* meet the minimum requirements as elaborated below to receive a pass/satisfactory grade.

You will not receive a final grade lower than what your total number of points is worth according to the key above, but I may decide to give you a higher grade.

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. You will have 3 grace absences for whatever reason during the semester. Your grade will begin to suffer from the 4th absence, and you will automatically receive an F grade for the course once you have reached 8 absences. Please note that I count arriving more than 10 minutes late or leaving before class ends as an absence. There are no exceptions to this policy and no “excused” absences that do not count. You are advised to use your grace absences wisely, including for illness and documented university-sponsored events. If you believe you have special circumstances that require accommodation beyond these rules, please come see me.

2. Participation – you are expected to do all assigned readings as elaborated in the schedule below, and participate in class discussions that will be based on those readings. This is an obvious prerequisite for serious exchanges. Readings are not only essential to understanding the course material; they also complement the information provided in lectures.

If you don't say anything throughout the semester, come to class late or leave early, don't take notes, use unrelated internet resources while in class, or appear sleepy or hung-over, your participation grade will be affected, and as you can imagine, not positively.

Minimum points: 100. You must receive at least the minimum number of points in this section to pass the course.

3. Essays – there's no final exam or paper in this course. Instead, you will be writing essays, each of no less than 1500 and no more than 2,500 words, on a given question posted on Blackboard. Essays will be due on Mondays, 2 weeks after the relevant question appears on Blackboard (no delays, no makeups, and you must physically be in class on the days essays are due, arrive on time, and stay for the entire class for your submission to be graded). There will be a total of 5 opportunities to write essays, the last of which will be due on the day originally scheduled for our final exam: Tuesday, 05/07. It will still be of the same length. Only 4 essays will be counted toward the final grade

(for a maximum of 200 points per essay). You may choose to write only 4, or write 5 and I will count the 4 with the highest grade.

In addition, I will grant bonus points at my discretion to students whose written work significantly improves throughout the semester, to offset early lousy performance.

Minimum points: 450. You must receive at least the minimum number of points in this section to pass the course.

See the appendix to this syllabus for what I expect in essays and how to write them.

Miscellaneous things you should know:

1. I care a lot about how you write. In fact, how you write is more important to me than what you say. I have a website dedicated to improving college students' writing skills (<http://www.writingmaster.net>). The website has all the information you may need on grammar, style, punctuation, and citing sources. When grading your written work, I will assume you are familiar with the rules described on this website. If you use facebook, I suggest you "like" this site and follow it to receive occasional writing and academic tips. If you find it useful, feel free to spread the word and share this resource with your friends. It is free to use.

2. I have zero tolerance for academic integrity violations, and especially plagiarism. The rules of how to use sources properly are explained in the website I mentioned above. Not knowing the rules will not exempt you from the need to follow them. Even the slightest suspicion of plagiarism, cheating in the form of copying the work of another student or having someone write an exam for you, or any other violation of academic misconduct (see http://college.emory.edu/home/academic/policy/honor_code.html for more details) will result in an automatic F grade and a report being sent to the Honor Council.

3. Emory University complies with the regulations of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and offers accommodations to students with disabilities. Students who have a disability that prevents them from fully demonstrating their academic skills should contact me as soon as possible to discuss arrangements that can ensure full participation and facilitate their learning experience. All information will be held in strict confidence.

Course Schedule:

There are three necessary purchases for this course, available from the Emory University Bookstore or amazon.com and other similar online stores:

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)

Aron Rodrigue, *Jews and Muslims: Images of Sephardi and Eastern Jewries in Modern Times* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003)

In the schedule below, assignments from these two books appear as *Arab Lands*, *Modern Times*, and *Jews and Muslims*.

Readings from other sources will be available via the course's website on Blackboard in PDF form. Most of the books mentioned in the schedule below are also available at the 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/videos that appear under each week should be read/viewed *in preparation for* that week (with more precise per-class instructions given the week before). 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 we discuss them in class.

Weeks 1-2 (1/16, 18, 23, 25 – no class on 1/21, MLK day): Introduction, Jews and Muslims in the first centuries of Islam

Arab Lands, 3-39.

Monday, 1/21: **first essay** question posted in the afternoon

Week 3 (1/28, 30, 2/1): The middle ages

Arab Lands, 40-87.

Week 4 (2/4, 6, 8): The Expulsion from Spain, Jews under Ottoman rule

Arab Lands, 87-94.

Alexander Russell, *The Natural History of Aleppo* (London: 1794), 58-87.

Monday, 2/4: **first essay** due

Week 5 (2/11, 13, 15): First signs of modernity

Arab Lands, 95-107.

Modern Times, 3-26.

Monday, 2/11: **second essay** question posted after class

Wednesday, 2/13: “**When Arabic Was a Jewish Language**,” a public lecture by Prof. Norman Stillman of the University of Oklahoma (7:30 pm in the reception hall of the Carlos Museum). Prof. Stillman will speak to us during regular class time on that day as well.

Week 6 (2/18, 20, 22): The late nineteenth and early twentieth century

Modern Times, 27-46.

Jews and Muslims, 7-21, and only the parts in *italics* on pages 25-124.

Week 7 (2/25, 27, 3/1): Zionism and other ideologies

Modern Times, 47-91.

Jews and Muslims, 125-6, 135, 179, 201-5, 217-18, 245.

Monday, 2/25: **second essay** due

Week 8 (3/4, 6, 8): The 1930s and World War II

Modern Times, 93-140.

Monday, 3/4: **third essay** question posted after class

3/11, 13, 15 – no class, spring break

Week 9 (3/18, 20, 22): The foundation of Israel and the dissolution of Jewish communities in Arab countries

Modern Times, 141-176.

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

Week 10 (3/25, 27, 29): Arab/Mizrahi Jews in Israel, 1950s

Monday, 3/25 is the eve of Passover. We will not meet but rather have an online class that day.

Eli Amir, *Scapegoat: a novel* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987).

note: this book will be available as PDF; you can also find copies of this novel on abebooks.com and alibris.com (it is currently out of print).

Wednesday, 3/27: **third essay** due by the beginning of class

Week 11 (4/1, 3, 5): Arab/Mizrahi/Sephardi Jews in Israel: challenges and struggles, 1950s-1970s

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

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

Primary documents in translation will be distributed in class.

Movie: *Turn Left at the End of the World*

Monday, 4/1: **fourth essay** question posted after class

Week 12 (4/8, 10, 12): Revival in the 1980s and 1990s

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

David Lehmann and Batia Siebzehner, *Remaking of Israeli Judaism: The Challenge of Shas* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2006), 120-168.

Uri Cohen and Nissim Leon, "The new Mizrahi middle class: ethnic mobility and class integration in Israel," *Journal of Israeli History* 27 (2008), 1:51-64.

Eitan Schiffman, "The Shas school system in Israel," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 11 (2005), 89-124.

Week 13 (4/15, 17, 19): Mizrahi music

Motti Regev and Edwin Seroussi, *Popular Music and National Culture in Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 191-235.

Movie: *Zohar*

We will watch and analyze video clips of Mizrahi music in class.

Monday, 4/15: **fourth essay** due

Week 14 (4/22, 24, 26, 29): Sephardi Jews in America, Conclusion

Aviva Ben-UR, *Sephardic Jews in America: a Diasporic History* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 23-50, 108-149.

Monday, 4/22: **fifth essay** question posted after class

Tuesday, 5/7: **fifth essay** due by 12noon.

Appendix: How to Write Essays (or: what I will be looking for)

Each essay will be your response to a question posted on Blackboard at least 2 weeks before the deadline. Your response has to be clearly written, with the main argument laid out in the introduction, evidence cited using footnotes (**and not** parenthetical citations), and with a conclusion that isn't simply a repetition of what you've already said. Here are some more particular guidelines:

1. All pages should be double spaced, Times New Roman font size 12, with the default margins (which are the same for most word processing softwares). Yes, this means that if you use Arial font instead of Times New Roman, you will lose points.
2. When you mention information that you've read elsewhere, or whose source is anyone but yourself, or that isn't too obvious (such as "the sun sets in the west"), you need to cite your source. This is true whether you are paraphrasing or quoting directly from the source. All citations must be in the form of footnotes at the bottom of the relevant page (and not at the end of the essay). Footnote numbers should be consecutive for the entire essay. Sources in footnotes should appear in full the first time mentioned, then in abbreviated form. Please see <http://writingmaster.net/citing-sources> for more on how to choose your sources and write footnotes. Some of the relevant information for this assignment is at the bottom of that page, so make sure you browse it till the end.

No bibliography lists, please! Footnotes are where all the information must appear.

You must use primary sources – you have three books full of documents, after all (and many others at the library).

3. Keep your language clean and simple. Proofread your essays time and again on paper, getting rid of redundant words. See <http://writingmaster.net> if you need more help on how to do this. I will especially be looking for informal or colloquial expressions that have no room in academic English, as well as attempts to outsmart yourselves, which

often result in sentences that are completely unintelligible. Avoid general or vague statements at all cost!

Questions I ask myself as I read papers, and which help me evaluate your work

1. Argument – is there a sound and meaningful argument, without the author merely summarizing what he/she has read in various sources?
2. Structure – does one topic lead to the next logically, without any abrupt shifts of discussions within the same paragraph or between paragraphs?
3. Why should I read? - is it clear by the end of the second page at the latest what this paper is going to be about, what will the arguments be, and how it would be structured?
4. Why should I care? - does the author deal with the “so what” question, explaining what is the meaning of the questions he/she deals with, why they deserve discussion, and what can we learn from them?
5. Further implications – does the author suggest further/broader implications to the questions he/she asks, or does he/she raise new questions not dealt with in the paper (without necessarily answering them)?
6. English: grammar – is there a correct use of the language – tenses, conditional sentences, would vs. will, may vs. might, avoiding fragments, subject that doesn't change within the same sentence/idea, correct use of pronouns, etc.?
7. English: style – are certain words repeated too many times in proximity? Is there overuse of trite phrases or too many choices of complicated expressions when simple ones would do? Does the author avoid the passive whenever possible? Does the author write in a crisp and concise language, avoiding long sentences?
8. English: punctuation – is punctuation done right (with special attention to commas)?
9. English: words to avoid – does the author use any of the phrases or words listed under the “words to avoid” section of my online writing guide?
10. Originality – is the work original (written by the author him/herself), or does it rely too heavily on quotations from other sources? Are all sources documented appropriately using footnotes? Has the author used primary sources?

I will provide more particular instructions in class.