

The Jews of Arab Lands
HIST 285-004/MESAS 270-000- all levels
Fall 2011 Semester – Yaron Ayalon
[View Syllabus](#)

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 move on to 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 Jewish communities in Arab countries experienced with the emergence of Zionism and the immigration to the State of Israel. We will devote the last third of the semester to the experiences of mizrahi Jews (those from Arab lands) in Israel. Topics covered will include the absorption of Middle Eastern Jews in Israel; the socioeconomic status of Jews from Arab lands in Israel and how it changed over the years; their involvement in Israeli politics and how it affected the immigrants as well as the Israeli political game; and the culture Jews from Arab lands brought with them, such as music and popular customs, and how the impact these have had upon Israeli society.

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.

Grading:

The maximum number of points you may earn for this course is 500. Grading will be distributed in the following manner:

Attendance – 50pts
Participation – 100pts
In class reports - 50pts
Midterm exam – 100pts
Final exam - 200pts

Your final grade will be determined by your points balance as of 12/12/11, according to the following key: above 470 points: A; 450-469: A-; 430-449: B+; 410-429: B; 390-409: B-; 375-389: C+; 355-374: C; 340-354: C-; 330-339: D+; 300-329: D; less than 300: F. 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.

Course Schedule:

There are two 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).

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

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.

Week 1 – introduction: Judaism, the Middle East, and Islam

Wednesday, 8/24 and Friday, 8/26

Week 2 – Jews and Muslims in the first centuries of Islam

Monday 8/29, Wednesday 8/31, and Friday 9/2

Arab Lands, 3-39, 115-118, 137-144, 149-151, 157-161, 167-175, 178-182.

Week 3 – the middle ages

Monday, 9/5 – no class, Labor Day

Wednesday, 9/7 and Friday, 9/9

Arab Lands, 40-87, 189-193, 201-3, 226-232, 247-248, 252-54, 269-274.

Week 4 – the Expulsion from Spain, Jews under Ottoman rule

Monday 9/12, Wednesday 9/14, and Friday 9/16

Arab Lands, 87-94, 289-302, 312-316.

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

Week 5 – first signs of modernity

Monday 9/19, Wednesday 9/21, and Friday 9/23

Arab Lands, 95-107, 324-339, 357-360, 393-405.

Modern Times, 3-26, 183-198.

Week 6 – the late nineteenth and early twentieth century

Monday 9/26, Wednesday 9/28, and Friday 9/30

Modern Times, 27-46, 199-206, 219-224, 231-244.

Week 7 – Zionism and other ideologies

Monday 10/3, Wednesday 10/5, and Friday 10/7

Modern Times, 47-91, 263-271, 279-287, 305-310, 318-323, 331-347.

*** Friday 10/7 – Midterm Exam due***

Week 8 – the 1930s and World War II

Monday, 10/10 – no class, fall break.

Wednesday, 10/12 and Friday, 10/14.

Modern Times, 93-140, 368-375, 379-382, 386-403, 405-417, 435-446.

Week 9 – the foundation of Israel and the dissolution of Jewish communities in Arab countries

Monday 10/17, Wednesday 10/19, and Friday 10/21

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 – Arab/Mizrahi Jews in Israel, 1950s

Monday 10/24, Wednesday 10/26, and Friday 10/28

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 for under \$5.

Week 11 – Arab/Mizrahi Jews in Israel: challenges and struggles. 1950s-1970s

Monday 10/31, Wednesday 11/2, and Friday 11/4

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*

Week 12 – revival in the 1980s and 1990s

Monday, 11/7 and Wednesday, 11/9

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.

Week 13 – Mizrahi music

Monday 11/14, Wednesday 11/16, and Friday 11/18

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.

Week 14 – Mizrahi Jews, education, and opportunities for socio-economic mobility

Monday, 11/21 and Wednesday, 11/23

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.

Movie: *Aviva my Love*

Friday, 11/25 – no class, Thanksgiving

Week 15 – Jews from Arab Lands in America

Monday 11/28, Wednesday 11/30, and Monday 12/5

Friday, 12/2 – no class, Middle East Studies Association annual conference.

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

Friday 12/6 – final exam questions distributed.

Monday 12/9 – final exams due by 11 am.