

“Sephardic Jews in the Diaspora and Israel”

HIST/MESAS/JS 370- Undergraduate lecture course (all levels)

Spring 2013 - Dr. Yaron Ayalon

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 help you become 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 five essays count for 70 per cent of your grade, the remainder of the class grade will be derived from class participation.

Requirements:

1. Attendance – you are expected to attend each class, do the assigned readings and participate in class discussions.
2. Essays – there’s no final exam or paper in this course. Instead, you will be writing five essays, each of no less than 1500 and no more than 2,500 words (that is 6-10 pages), on a given question posted on Blackboard. Essays will be due on Mondays, two weeks after the relevant question appears on Blackboard I encourage you to be timely in turning in your essays. The last essay will be due the day that the final exam is otherwise scheduled.

Writing is important. It is a skill that you will take through life. I have created a website dedicated to improving writing skills (<http://www.writingmaster.net>). The website has the necessary reminders about grammar, style, punctuation, and citing sources. And you will find a summary for writing essays on blackboard as well. When grading your written

work, I will assume you are familiar with the rules explained on the website. These are all rules that come from the Chicago Manual of Style which is the benchmark for professional writing. No matter how well you write now, an objective of the class should be seeking to improve your writing style.

Course Schedule:

There are three books to purchase for the course. They are available at on-line sources and at the Barnes and Noble store on the Emory University campus.

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.

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 with which you are not familiar. You may use the internet or any other reliable source you like to dig out that information. Knowing something about the author of a written item, helps us know a bit about an author's viewpoint or slant. We shall be discussing topics as well as how authors treat those topics and why they choose to do so.

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.