The CUNY Graduate Center Ph.D. Program in History
Literature of the Nineteenth Century Middle East (HIST 80050/MES 78000)

Prof. Lale Can
lcan@ccny.cuny.edu

* Please note that this is a working syllabus and is subject to modification and changes in readings and assignments.

This course provides an introduction to the main themes and approaches in the history and historiography of the Middle East in the long 19th century, from roughly the late 1700s through the First World War. Our primary focus will be on regions under the rule of the Ottoman Empire and, to a lesser extent, the Qajar Iran. Drawing on classic literature and important new scholarship, the course will cover themes such as state-building and governance; religious authority, identity, and confessionalization; economic and labor history; gender and law; histories of medicine and environment; migration; legal reform and modernization; and the impact of imperialism and globalization. Students who complete the course will have a solid grounding in the literature of the Middle East, which will serve as a basis for preparation for oral exams as well as for future teaching and research.

**Learning Objectives**

The heart of this seminar is class discussion, which depends on careful readings of all required books. The main goal of this class is to familiarize students with nineteenth-century Ottoman/Middle East history as well as trends in the historical literature. Students should master individual books as well as broader debates. Students will learn to read critically, with attention to questions, methodologies, sources, and arguments. This class will prepare doctoral students who are Middle East majors for their first written exam, and prepare majors and minors for the oral examination. It will also lay the groundwork for teaching courses on the modern Middle East. MA students will gain a firm grounding in nineteenth-century history.

**Assignments and Course Expectations**

- **Response papers (35%)**  
  Each week, students will write a 1-2 page (single-spaced, approx. 750-1000 words) analytical response to the readings, which broadly places the book within the field, discusses the author’s intervention and contribution(s), and main arguments.

  Ph.D. students preparing for exams are required to submit a final annotated bibliography that includes entries for all readings at the end of the semester.

- **Book review and review essays (40%)**  
  Each student is required to write one book review (1,500 words) on a recent work in the field, as well as a review essay (2,500) on books on a theme chosen in consultation with the professor.

- **Participation (25%)**  
  We will create a schedule for student presentations to introduce the readings and begin discussion about the book’s contributions, sources, and methodology. Students should also read book reviews to help them assess the book’s reception in the field. As members of the Graduate Center academic community, students are also expected to participate in events such as “Dissections” and the Race and the Middle East/North Africa Mellon Sawyer Seminar.

**SCHEDULE**

**Week 1: Introduction to the course**

* AHR Roundtable: Historians and the Question of “Modernity” (June 2011)  
  (selections: Introduction, Benite, Chakrabarty, Wolin)
**Week 2: Ottoman Governance, Reform, and Modernization**


**Week 3: The Imperial Turn**


**Week 4: Sectarianism and Religion**


Selim Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015).


*Additional recommended reading:*


**Week 5: Ottoman Colonialism**

Selim Deringil, “They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery”: The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate, *SCSSH*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (Apr., 2003), pp. 311-342


*Recommended:*
Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*, Introduction, 3-32.

**Week 6: Nationalism and Imperial Identities, Part I**


**Week 7: Nationalism and Imperial Identities, continued**


**Week 8: Revolutionary Times**


*Recommended:*
Week 9: Family, Gender, and Law – Part I


Week 10: Family, Gender, and Law – Part II


Elizabeth Thompson, Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon (NY: Columbia University Press, 2000)


Additional recommended reading:

Afsaneh Najmabadi, Women with mustaches and men without beards gender and sexual anxieties of iranian modernity (Berkely, Ca.: University of California Press, 2010), selections.

Week 11: Circuits and Transnational History


Lale Can, Spiritual Subjects: Central Asian Pilgrims and the Ottoman Hajj at the End of Empire (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 2020).

David Gutman, “Armenian Migration to North America, State Power, and Local Politics in the Late Ottoman Empire,” CSSAAME, Volume 34, Number 1, 2014, pp. 176-190.

Additional recommended reading:

Week 12: Land and Labor

Donald Quataert, *Miners and the State in the Ottoman Empire or Ottoman Manufacturing in the Age of the Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).


**Additional recommended reading:**


**Week 13: Environmental History**


Chris Gratien, *The Unsettled Plain: An Environmental History of the Late Ottoman Frontier* (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 2022), selections.


**Week 14: History of Science/Technology**


