

Revolutions in the Middle East from Medieval to Modern Times

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Office Hours: Monday 11am-1pm or by appointment

HIST535/575

Peterson Hall 1106



Course Description

Why and how do revolutions happen? Social scientists have been offering general theoretical and analytical frameworks of analysis for the “why” question. Historians, however, are more interested with the “how” side of the problem. This history course investigates major mass movements, uprisings, and revolutions in the Middle East from the rise of Islam to the Arab Uprisings of the past decade. As in other regions of the world, Middle Eastern history is replete with social activism. Yet, only a few had a marked effect on the trajectory of history and produced a new order. The course will focus on a select number of revolutions with a major impact, including those undertaken by Sufis, students, slaves, secret societies, militaries, political parties, and sectarian groups. For each case, principal actors and participants, ideologies, main events, reforms, symbolism, and artistic representations will be identified and analyzed with respect to the broader regional and global contexts. Across various Middle Eastern societies, cultural, material, and institutional roots of revolutionism will be examined. While mass movements will be studied case by case, the perennial question of whether Middle Eastern societies are inherently prone to revolutionary activity will be discussed throughout.

Assignments and Grading:

Participation	% 30
Review Paper	% 30
Final Paper	% 40

Attendance Requirements:

- Read all assigned material carefully before the class meeting
- Get acquainted with the broader context and issues related to the topic
- Prepare two thoughtful questions/prompts to share and develop ideas
- Actively participate in class discussion

Course Policies

- *Class activities will involve lectures, discussions and student presentations.*
- *Attendance is required and all excused absences should be accompanied with proper documentation.*
- *Attendants must have read the course material prior to class time.*
- *For assignments and performance all are responsible from the full content of the course.*
- *Students are strictly bound by George Mason Honor Code (<http://academicintegrity.gmu.edu>) and common rules of academic integrity.*
- *Students who request academic accommodation for a warranted condition should first contact the Office of Disability Services at 703-993-2474, <http://ods.gmu.edu/>.*
- *Electronic devices in classroom may not be used beyond the purpose of note-taking.*
- *All should strictly comply with George Mason University Honor Code and adhere to the standards of academic integrity. For more information see <http://oai.gmu.edu/honor-code>.*
- *All students taking courses with a face-to-face component are required to follow the university's public health and safety precautions and procedures outlined on the university Safe Return to Campus webpage (<https://www2.gmu.edu/safe-return-campus>). Similarly, all students in face-to-face and hybrid courses must also complete the Mason COVID Health Check prior to coming to campus. The COVID Health Check system uses a color code system and students will receive either a Green, Yellow, Red, or Blue email response. Only students who receive a "green" notification are permitted to attend courses with a face-to-face component. If you suspect that you are sick or have been directed to self-isolate, please quarantine or get testing. Faculty are allowed to ask you to show them that you have received a Green email and are thereby permitted to be in class.*
- *Students are required to follow Mason's current policy about facemask-wearing. As of August 11, 2021, all community members are required to wear a facemask in all indoor settings, including classrooms. An [appropriate facemask](#) must cover your nose and mouth at all times in our classroom. If this policy changes, you will be informed; however, students who prefer to wear masks will always be welcome in the classroom.*
- *If the campus closes, or if a class meeting needs to be canceled or adjusted due to weather or other concern, students should check Blackboard [or other instruction as appropriate] for updates on how to continue learning and for information about any changes to events or assignments.*
- *Activities and assignments in this course will regularly use the Blackboard learning system, available at <https://mymason.gmu.edu>. Students are required to have regular, reliable access to a computer with an updated operating system (recommended: Windows 10 or Mac OSX 10.13 or higher) and a stable broadband Internet connection (cable modem, DSL, satellite broadband, etc., with a consistent 1.5 Mbps [megabits per second] download speed or higher. You can check your speed settings using the speed test on this website.)*
- *Activities and assignments in this course will regularly use web-conferencing software (Blackboard Collaborate / Zoom). In addition to the requirements*

above, students are required to have a device with a functional camera and microphone. In an emergency, students can connect through a telephone call, but video connection is the expected norm.

- *Videorecordings -- whether made by instructors or students -- of class meetings that include audio, visual, or textual information from other students are private and must not be shared outside the class*
- *Live video conference meetings (e.g. Collaborate or Zoom) that include audio, textual, or visual information from other students must be viewed privately and not shared with others in your household or recorded and shared outside the class.*

Course Plan

January 23

Introduction

January 30

Approaches, Perspectives, Concepts, Frameworks of Analysis

The Rise of Islam, The Civil Wars

The Umayyad Consolidation

Readings:

Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, pp. 311-448

Lewis, *Political Language of Islam*, pp. 91-117

"The Covenant of Madina"

Recommended:

Arjomand, *Revolution*, 1-42

Arjomand, "The Constitution of Medina," pp. 555-575

Abou El Fadl, *Rebellion and Violence in Islamic Law*, 321-342

Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 146-186

<https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/the-constitution-of-medina-translation-commentary-and-meaning-today>

February 6

The Abbasid Revolution and the Zanj Rebellion

Readings:

Popovic, *The Revolt of African Slaves*, pp. 9-90

Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework of Inquiry*, pp. 104-127

Zaman, "The Abbasid Revolution," 119-149

al-Tabari, *The Revolt of the Zanj*, pp. 30-68

al-Tabari, *The Abbasid Revolution*, pp. 61-70

Recommended:

<https://www.medievalists.net/2019/02/zanj-revolt-slave-war-medieval-iraq/>

Sheriff, "The Zanj Rebellion and the Transition from Plantation to Military Slavery," pp. 246-270

Saunders, *A History of Medieval Islam*, 59-105

February 13

The Ismailis and The Fatimids

The Anarchists

Readings:

Daftary, *The Ismailis*, pp. 34-137

Hamdani, *From Revolution to State*, 1-32

al-Numan, *Founding the Fatimid State*, 20-48

Yucesoy, "Political Anarchism, Dissent, and Marginal Groups in the Early Ninth Century," 61-84

Recommended:

Saunders, *A History of Medieval Islam*, pp. 125-140

February 20

Sufi Rebellions: Baba Rasul, Bedreddin

The Rise of the Safavids

Readings:

Peacock, *Islam, Literature, and Society in Mongol Anatolia*, pp. 218-251

Kastritsis, "The Revolt of Seyh Bedreddin in the Context of the Ottoman Civil War,"

Ocak, "Baba Ilyas-ı Horasani," pp. 1-5

Karatas, "Bedreddin Simavna," pp. 1-4

February 27

The Empire and its Discontents

Jalalis, Suhtes, Jannissaries

Readings:

Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats*, 141-188

Kafadar, "Janissaries and Other Rifraff of Ottoman Istanbul," pp. 113-134

Tezcan, *Second Ottoman Empire*, pp. 191-227

Supplementary Source:

el-Haj, *The 1730 Revolution*

March 6

Religious Revivalism and anti-Colonial Movements

Readings:

Dallal, "The Origins and Objectives of Islamic Revivalist Thought, 1750-1850," pp. 341-359

Yesil, "Looking at the French Revolution through Ottoman Eyes," pp. 283-304

Supplementary Material:

Mehdi, "Letters and Proclamations," 463-468

March 13

Spring Break

March 20

Iran from Constitutionalism to Nationalism

Readings:

Keddie, *Modern Iran*, pp. 1-127

March 27

The Young Turks and The Turkish Republic

Readings:

Hanioglu, *Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, pp.144-167

Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 93-205

Ataturk, "Speech to the Assembly, 1924," 432-449

April 3

From the Arab Revolt to the Egyptian Revolution

Readings:

Gordon, *Nasser's Blessed Movement*, pp. 14-144

Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, (selections)

Abd al-Nasser, "Speech Delivered by President Gamal Abd al-Nasser,"

Supplementary Material:

Lawrence of Arabia (David Lean, 1962)

April 10

Anti-Colonialism and The Battle of Algiers

Readings:

Connelly, *Diplomatic Revolution*, pp. 119-172

Fanon, *The Wretched of the World*, (selections)

Fanon, *Dying Colonialism*, pp. 35-69

Supplementary Material:

The Battle of Algiers (Gillo Pontecorvo, 1965)

April 17

Islamic Revolutions of Iran and Afghanistan

Readings:

Keddie, *Modern Iran*, pp. 105-263

Nojumi, *The Rise of the Taliban*, pp. 83-158

Supplementary Material:

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/01/24/the-iranian-revolution-a-timeline-of-events/>

April 24

The Arab Uprisings

Readings:

Bayat, *Revolution without Revolutionaries*, pp. 1-178

May 1

Presentations