

University of Florida

Jews in the Muslim World – The Ottoman Impact

JST3930

Fall 2025

W | Periods 8-9-10 (3:00 PM – 6:00 PM)

Instructor: Yehoshua Ecker

yehoshua.ecker@ufl.edu

381 Dauer Hall

Office hours: TBA and by appointment

Course description

Jews in the Muslim World surveys the history of Jews in Muslim societies and under Muslim rule, from the conquests of the 7th century to the dispersions and transformations of the 20th century, using the political history and chronology of the Muslim world as a scaffold for outlining and contextualizing the Jewish experience. Imperial experience is central to Muslim history and to historical developments in general, as is its role in the development of religious and ethnic groups. One of the longest lasting Muslim empires, spanning the late medieval, early modern, and modern periods, was the Ottoman Empire (1300-1918). Straddling three continents and encompassing a uniquely diverse social reality of multiple ethnic and religious groups, it offered stability and tolerance, and had a profound and lasting impact on Jewish history, shaping Jewish demographic, political, communal and religious trends for centuries. The course traces these trends throughout Ottoman imperial existence.

Student learning outcomes

- Students will be familiar with the chronological contours and geographies of the Ottoman and other contemporary Muslim empires and their place in Muslim history.
- Students will be familiar with the general dynamics of imperial experience and their impact on subject populations.
- Students will be able to:
 - ✓ identify the stages and development of Jewish history under Islam during the Ottoman centuries.
 - ✓ identify major shifts and changes in Jewish history between 1300 and 1918.
 - ✓ evaluate statements about Jews in the Muslim world and Jewish-Muslim relations in this period.
 - ✓ evaluate the impact of past events on modern developments.

Course outline

Week	Imperial Developments	Topics		Readings
1	Introduction & Periodizations	The course		
		Jewish history		
		Empires and Jews		
2	The Impact of the First Islamic Empires (520s-1220s)	Conquests, consolidation, fragmentation		Cleveland, ch.1-2
		Urbanization, acculturation, commercialization, expansion		Goitein
		Increased exchanges, mobility, compatibility & conformity		Scheindlin ch.4
		Accumulated political traditions: Muslim, Persian, Byzantine, Turkic		
3	Shatterzones of Empires (1220s-1420s)	The aftermath of Seljuk, Crusader, Ayyubid and Mamluk warfare & conquests	Jewish communities & populations begin to dwindle	Cook, 356-376; Botticini & Eckstein, 248-267
		Byzantine transitions		
		Mongol conquests & successor states	Targetting urban populations	
		Waves of plague	General population decline	
		The post Mongol world	Power struggles & disintegration	
		Timur's empire building	Destruction & displacement	
4	Rise of the Ottomans (1320s-1420s)	Anatolian political realities		Epstein, ch.1-2
		New urban centers		
		Policies towards non-Muslims		
5	From Regional Power to Imperial Superpower (1420s-1520s)	Ottoman accelerated expansion		
		Holy places & "Pax Ottomanica"	Rebuilding & redevelopment	Shafir; Panaite, ch.4
		The Ottomans vs. other "Gunpowder Empires"		Cleveland, ch.3
6-8	The Making of the Ottoman World (1520s-1620s)	The making of Ottoman Jews	From Byzantine to Ottoman	Egger, 343-6; Cambridge 7, ch.3,31 (Hacker)*
			The impact of persecutions & expulsions in the Christian West	Scheindlin, 112-121
			Jewish settlement in the Ottoman Balkans and Anatolia	Meddeb & Stora, part II, prologue & ch.1 (Veinstein et al.)
			The dynamics of Sephardi & Ashkenazi diasporas	

		The growing importance of the Holy Land	Pilgrimage & immigration	Eisenstein-Franco
			Rabbinic innovation & codification	Twersky
			Mysticism & messianism	
		The centrality of Ottoman Jews	Geography, demography, stability	Scheindlin, 123-136; Baskin (Levy)
			Ottoman heartlands, imperial networks & projected power	
9-10	Challenges to the Imperial Order (1620s-1720s)	Reconnecting: Diasporas, Networks and Channels of Transmission	The growth of urban networks and trading diasporas	Benbassa & Rodrigue, ch.1; Ben-Naeh 2008, ch.2
			Rabbinic networks and interactions	Lehmann, introduction; David, EJ2;
		Troubles across the borders: religious pressures, civil wars & wars of religion	The rival empire: Safavid transformations & pressures	Meddeb & Stora, part II, ch.3a; Cambridge 7, ch.39 (Moreen)
			Waves of refugees & captives	
		Responses to crisis	Coordinated inter-communal relief efforts	
			Messianic challenges	TBA
11-12	Changing imperial realities (1720s-1820s)	Imperial and trans-imperial networks & rivalries	Middlemen, Courtiers, Translators, Merchants, Bankers	Ben-Naeh 2017; Israel, ch.6
			Intercessors and inter-communal interventions	
			Religious interpretations & challenges	Lehmann (2006), ch.1 (15-25)
		Local realities & shrinking imperial domains	Algeria, Tunisia, Lybia, Egypt, Crimea, Greece, Kurdistan	Meddeb & Stora, part II, ch.3b-c; Cambridge 7, ch.38 (Parfitt)*; Laskier-Lev, ch.7
		Comparative views	Iranian Jews and their diasporas	
			Models of interaction in Morocco	Schroeter; Meddeb & Stora, part II, ch.2
13	The Final Century (1820s-1920s)	New ways: accelerated changes in technology, culture and politics		Cleveland, ch.4-5 / Cook, 796-846*; Meddeb & Stora, part II, ch.4; Stillman 1979, ch.5; Stillman 1991, ch.1-2;
		New empires		Meri, ch.2; Rodrigue
		New opportunities and dangers		
14	Post Imperial Impact (1920s-2020s) & Conclusion			

* Selected sections (TBA)

Readings include Chapters from the following:

Main texts

- [MS] Abdelwahab Meddeb and Benjamin Stora (eds.), A History of Jewish Muslim Relations: From the Origins to the Present Day (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013).
- [C] The Cambridge History of Judaism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
- Vol. 7 (2017): Jonathan Karp, Adam Sutcliffe (eds.), The Early Modern World, 1500–1815
- Vol. 8 (2017): Mitchell B. Hart, Tony Michels (eds.), The Modern World, 1815–2000
- [S1] Norman A. Stillman, The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Source Book (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979).
- [S2] Norman Stillman, The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991).

Background reading

- Michael A. Cook, A History of the Muslim World: From Its Origins to the Dawn of Modernity (Princeton University Press, 2024).
- [E1] Vernon O. Egger, A History of the Muslim World to 1750: The Making of a Civilization, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2018).
- [E2] Vernon O. Egger, A History of the Muslim World since 1260: The Making of a Global Community, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2018).
- William L. Cleveland, Martin P. Bunton, A History of the Modern Middle East (7th ed., Routledge, 2024) [or any other edition].
- Woolf Institute, Jewish-Christian-Muslim Relations: A Timeline, Online: <http://www.woolf.cam.ac.uk/uploads/timeline%20-%20jcm.pdf>

Additional texts

- Yaron Ben-Nach, Jews in the Realm of the Sultans: Ottoman Jewish Society in the Seventeenth Century (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).
- Yaron Ben-Nach, "Ottoman Jewish courtiers: an oriental type of the court Jew", Jewish Culture and History, 19:1 (2017), pp. 56–70.
- Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, Sephardi Jewry: A History of the Judeo-Spanish Community, 14th-20th Centuries [original title: The Jews of the Balkans] (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
- Maristella Botticini and Zvi Eckstein, The Chosen Few: How Education Shaped Jewish History, 70-1492 (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012).
- Abraham David, "Sheluhei Erez Israel", Encyclopaedia Judaica, 2nd Ed., Vol.18 (2007), pp. 446-452.
- Judah David Eisenstein, Moise Franco, (Gotthard Deutsch, ed.), "Pilgrimage", Jewish Encyclopedia, vol. 10 (1905), pp. 35-38. Online: <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/12149-pilgrimage>
- Mark Alan Epstein, The Ottoman Jewish Communities and Their Role in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries (Freiburg: Klaus Schwartz, 1980).

- Shelomo Dov Goitein, "The Jews Under Islam", Part One: "6th–16th centuries", in Elie Kedourie (Ed.), The Jewish World: History and Culture of the Jewish People (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1979), pp. 178-185. Also online: <http://cojs.org/the-jews-under-islam-part-one-shelom-dov-goitein-the-jewish-world-history-and-culture-of-the-jewish-people/>
- H.Z. Hirschberg, A History of the Jews in North Africa, 2nd ed., English translation (Leiden: Brill, 1974).
- Jonathan I. Israel, European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism, 1550-1750 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).
- Michael M. Laskier, and Yaacov Lev (eds), The Divergence of Judaism and Islam: Interdependence, Modernity, and Political Turmoil (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011),
 Ch.4: Ömer Turan, "Sharing the Same Fate: Muslims and Jews of the Balkans", pp. 51-73.
 Ch.7: Bat-Zion Eraqi Klorman, "Yemen: Muslim and Jewish Interactions in the Tribal Sphere", pp. 125-142.
- Matthias B. Lehmann, Emissaries from the Holy Land: The Sephardic Diaspora and the Practice of Pan-Judaism in the Eighteenth Century (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).
- Matthias B. Lehmann, Ladino Rabbinic Literature and Ottoman Sephardic Culture (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006).
- Avigdor Levy, "Ottoman Empire", in: Judith Baskin, ed. Cambridge Dictionary of Judaism and Jewish Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 465-468.
- Avigdor Levy, ed. The Jews of the Ottoman Empire (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1994).
- Bernard Lewis, The Jews of Islam, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).
- Josef Meri (ed.), The Routledge Handbook of Muslim-Jewish Relations (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).
- Viorel Panaite, Ottoman Law of War and Peace, 2nd ed. (Brill, 2019).
- Nissim Rejwan, The Last Jews in Baghdad: remembering a lost homeland (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), Appendix A: "The Jews of Iraq: A Brief Historical Sketch", pp. 209-217.
- Aron Rodrigue, "The Ottoman Diaspora: The Rise and Fall of Ladino Literary Culture", in David Biale, ed., The Cultures of the Jews: A New History (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), pp. 863-885.
- Raymond P. Scheindlin, A Short History of the Jewish People: From Legendary Times to Modern Statehood (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- Daniel J. Schroeter, "Jewish Communities of Morocco: History and Identity," in: Vivian B. Mann, ed., Morocco: Jews and Art in a Muslim Land (London: Merrell, in association with The Jewish Museum, New York, 2000), pp. 25-54.
- Nir Shafir, "In an Ottoman Holy Land: The Hajj and the Road from Damascus, 1500–1800", History of Religions 60:1 (2020), pp. 1-36.
- Isadore Twersky, "The Shulhan Arukh. Enduring Code of Jewish Law", Judaism 16:2 (Spring 1967), pp. 141-158.

Grading

Attendance and Participation: 20

Weekly questions for the readings (12 weeks): 24 [2 each]

2 take-home map quizzes: 20 (10 each)

2 timeline assignments: 20 (10 each)

Final take-home assignment: 20

Optional:

Research paper (after approval), 7-10 pages / up to 4000 words (due on the day of the last class) + 1 letter size page “poster”: 20

Assignments details

TBA - Detailed instructions for the assignments will be provided at the beginning of the semester.

Assignment submission dates

Weekly questions are due every week by Friday; Map quizzes are due by Wednesday on the week they are assigned; Timeline assignments are due by Monday on the week after they are assigned; Take-home final – after last day of classes [TBA]; Optional paper – last day of classes.

Syllabus Changes

The syllabus is subject to change. Changes will be announced. Changes and adjustments are to be expected.

Class Policies

Attendance: Attendance is required and will be taken at every class meeting: please write your name and sign the dated attendance sheet. Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies and require appropriate documentation. Read the university attendance policies here: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>. *When possible, please let me know in advance if you will not be attending a class session.* You are allowed up to 2 undocumented absences, after which any unexcused absence will affect your grade (4 points off for every absence). Excused absences include documented medical emergency, family crisis, military service, university sanctioned or official activities.

Email: As a matter of policy, UFL related communications are delegated to your UFL email. Information concerning the course, especially changes in venue, readings, assignments, etc., will be disseminated via Canvas announcements. Please make sure that your contact information is updated and that you are signed up to receive notification of course announcements.

Turning in assignments: Students are required to provide all assignments in digital form, by the date and time they are due (extra time in case of documented emergencies or extreme circumstances will be considered).

Late Papers and Tests: Tests and papers will not be accepted late without medical documentation or review of specific circumstances.

Electronic devices: All electronic devices are allowed, as long as you use them for class purposes or for other necessary purposes (emergency calls and updates, essential time sensitive communications). Please make sure they do not interfere with the class or disturb other students, do not emit high volume sounds, and are set to reasonably silent mode.

Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code: The University of Florida holds its students to the highest standards. Students are encouraged to read the University of Florida Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code (Regulation 4.040), so they are aware of these standards. The University principles address respect for people and property, for fairness, for Laws and Regulations, and for academic integrity. Any violation of the Student Honor Code will result in a referral to the Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution and may result in academic sanctions and further student conduct action.

The University of Florida Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code (UF Regulation 4.040) can be found at these links:
<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>
<https://policy.ufl.edu/regulation/4-040/>
<https://policy.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/UF-Regulation-4.040.pdf>

The processes of applying the codes can be found at the Dean of Students Office website:

<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-honor-code/>

<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-code/>

Academic Honesty:

Academic honesty and integrity are fundamental values of the University. UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Students commit to holding themselves and their peers to the high standard of honor required by the Student Honor Code. Any Student who becomes aware of a violation of the Student Honor Code is encouraged to report the violation to the appropriate University Official. Click the links above to read the Conduct Code. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is defined in the University of Florida's Student Honor Code as follows: “A Student must not represent as the student's own work all or any portion of the work of another person or Entity.” To avoid plagiarism students must give proper attribution to any source used or consulted (oral or written materials, published or unpublished), and clearly mark and attribute direct quotes. Students should follow their faculty's policy on collaboration, should understand how to properly cite sources, and should not give nor receive an improper academic advantage in any manner through any medium. Plagiarism on any assignment will automatically result in a failing grade.

Course Evaluations: Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at: <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluer.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at: <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

Accommodations: Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center and provide appropriate documentation as early as possible in the semester. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester. To get started use this link: <https://disability.ufl.edu/get-started/> or call 352-392-8565.

Grading Policies and Scale: Current university grades and grading policies are explained here: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>

The grading scale used for this class:

		A	93-100+	A-	90-92
B+	87-89	B	83-86	B-	80-82
C+	77-79	C	73-76	C-	70-72
D+	68-69	D	63-67	D-	60-62
F	<60				

Campus Resources

Health and Wellness

- *U Matter, We Care:* If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit U Matter, We Care website to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress. <https://umatter.ufl.edu/>
- *Counseling and Wellness Center:* Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services. <https://counseling.ufl.edu/>
- *Student Health Care Center:* Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit the Student Health Care Center website. <https://shcc.ufl.edu/>
- *UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center:* For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website. <https://ufhealth.org/locations/uf-health-shands-emergency-room-trauma-center/>
- *GatorWell Health Promotion Services:* For prevention services focused on optimal wellbeing, including Wellness Coaching for Academic Success, visit the GatorWell website or call 352-273-4450. <https://gatorwell.ufsa.ufl.edu/>
- *University of Florida Police Department – UFPD.* Emergency and Police Assistance, <https://police.ufl.edu/>. Non-emergencies: 352-392-1111. For emergencies and immediate help call 9-1-1

Academic Resources

- *E-learning technical support:* Contact the UF Computing Help Desk at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.
<https://helpdesk.ufl.edu/>
- *Career Connections Center:* Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services.
<https://career.ufl.edu/>
- *Library Support:* Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.
<https://answers.uflib.ufl.edu/ask>
- *Teaching Center:* Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352- 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.
<https://academicresources.clas.ufl.edu/>
- *Writing Studio:* 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.
<https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>
- *Student Complaints On-Campus:* Visit the Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code webpage for more information.
<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-%20code-student-conduct-code/>
- *On-Line Students Complaints:* View the Distance Learning Student Complaint Process. <https://distance.ufl.edu/getting-help/student-complaint-process/>

Additional lists of resources

There are additional resources on Campus, in Gainesville and in Alachua County, listed on UFL webpages, including:

- <https://www.ufadvising.ufl.edu/student-resources/>
- <https://academicresources.clas.ufl.edu/>
- <https://titleix.ufl.edu/get-help/campus-resources/>