

**Topics in Middle Eastern History:
Representing the Ottoman Empire in fiction & historical scholarship**

V77:0518.001 (MEIS), V57:0553.001 (History)

Fall 2006 Thursdays 2-4:45pm, Silver 621

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Office hours: Wednesday 1:30-3:30 & by appointment

course description

In this course, we will study representations of the Ottoman empire and the various cultures of its polyglot subject population by reading historical scholarship and fiction in tandem. Travellers' accounts and memoirs will occasionally provide us with additional questions about the quest for historical veracity. Should historians be skeptical of historical fiction? what might fictional histories be able to do that scholarly historical studies cannot? how trustworthy are travellogues and memoirs, or is that even a good question to ask about such writings? Authors of fiction whom we will read include Amin Maalouf, Orhan Pamuk, Ivo Andrić, and Louis de Bernières

We will focus primarily on the 16th century (the so-called golden age of the Ottoman empire) and the 19th and early 20th centuries, when the empire and its peoples experienced rapid change with the outcomes (paradoxical?) of modernization and collapse of the empire in World War I. Final papers will provide students with the opportunity to explore other periods in the Ottoman centuries. Themes that we may wish to keep an eye on include relations among religious and ethnic groups, gender relations, social and political hierarchies, the role of merchants and commerce, slaves and their roles in society, and the fluidity/fixity of state boundaries; this is only a partial list, and you are encouraged to contribute others.

Class sessions will consist of discussion of the readings as well as of lectures by the instructor that will supplement the "straight history" reading assignments. Grades will be computed as follows:

weekly papers (1 to 1½ pages)	45%
oral report	10%
map quiz (mid-October)	5%
class participation	15%
final paper (12-14 pages, due December 20)	25%

The important work in this class is the cumulative building up of ideas and observations about Ottoman society and culture as represented in our varied readings; it is for this reason that your week-to-week work (short papers, class participation) accounts for more than half the final grade. Needless to say, attendance is mandatory. As a seminar, the class requires that you take initiative by participating in class discussion, preparing oral reports (this can be done in pairs), and determining a topic for your final research paper (in consultation with me). The weekly short papers will ask for your reactions or thoughts on the week's reading; at first, I will assign topics, later you will be freer to set your own topic. Oral reports will be brief summaries of your research (in library, on line) on supplementary topics, e.g. one of our authors, an historical place, event or movement. For your final paper, it is critical that you choose a topic well in advance of the end of classes. One reason for this is to make sure that the research materials you will need are available and in your hands; we will begin discussing topics in early November.

schedule of classes and readings

(note: additional readings on historical events and periods may be assigned)

week one 9/7 Introduction

week two 9/14 Leo Africanus, fictional protagonist

Amin Maalouf, *Leo Africanus* **R** (Bobst Reserve), **B** (bookstore)

week three 9/21 Hasan al-Wazzan, the historical figure

Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-century Muslim Between Worlds*

Required reading: 1-87 plus an additional chapter of your choice **R, BB** (Blackboard)

week four 9/28 Foreign lands in the eyes of travellers

(or, what is foreign and who is a traveller?)

Selections from Ibn Battuta, Bertrandon de la Broquiere, others **BB**

week five 10/5 Straight history (?) of the Ottoman empire

Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire 1700-1923* **R, B**

week six 10/12 East, west, identity in fiction: "My Name is Red"

Orhan Pamuk, *My Name is Red* **R, B**

week seven 10/19 Ottomans observing Ottomans

Finish *My Name is Red*

Mustafa Ali on Cairo, poets on cultural corruption **BB**

week eight 10/26 Balkan society under pressures of empire

Ivo Andrić, *The Bridge on the Drina*

week nine 11/2 Balkan society under pressures of empire (2)

Finish *The Bridge on the Drina*

week ten 11/9 The collapse of Ottoman control in the Balkans

Selections from scholarly histories, memoirs, etc.

week eleven 11/16 Harmonies and disharmonies in a mixed village

Louis de Bernieres, *Birds without Wings*

week twelve 11/30 The collapse of a way of life – World War I

Finish *Birds without Wings*

week thirteen 12/7 Final class: your projects

Required books (all are on Bobst Reserve & in the bookstore)

The four novels listed above, and Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire 1700-1923*

Office hours

One of the worst things for a teacher is to sit through office hours when no one comes. Please do not feel shy about coming to office hours. It's okay to bring what seem like trivial questions to your instructors in office hours; the questions are probably not trivial. It is also appropriate to come to talk about writing, about ideas, about interests, etc.

Additional readings on Ottoman history

A list of supplementary readings will be provided, as well as a list of videos. Please feel free to request suggestions for further reading, or to bring good things you have found to our attention.

Guidelines for your oral report

Presentation:

- **between five and (absolute maximum) ten minutes** (it's best to practice and time your delivery out loud to make sure you haven't got too much)
- **start out by introducing what it is your report is about** (*don't* just start talking, forgetting that listeners may have no clue what topic you've researched)
- **stick to a few important or interesting points and make those points clear to your audience** (don't try to pack in everything you've learned, it's hard for listeners to absorb a stream of information; your job is to streamline all the research you have done for consumption by your audience)
- **if relevant, you might want to xerox an image, quotation, etc. to hand out**
- **as an ending, you might (but don't have to) say what you found to be the most relevant aspects of your report to our class**
- **there will be an opportunity for people to ask questions – it's fine to say "I don't know" if you don't**

Research

- **you are not expected to spend more than three hours on the research**
- **searching online is fine, just be discriminating about using what you find**
- **encyclopedias can be useful**
- **the information-desk people in the libraries can often suggest resources**
- **if you are stuck and can't find anything, maybe the topic is too difficult and should be abandoned**