

## Emergence of the Modern Middle East

**Course code:** POS 370/670

**Term and year:** Spring 2026

**Day and time:** Wednesdays, 11:15-14:00

**Instructor:** A. Ebru Akcasu, Ph.D.

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**Consultation hours:** Fridays, 11:00-11:30, Faculty Lounge (Room 4.10)

<b>Credits US/ECTS</b>	3/6	<b>Level</b>	Intermediate/Advanced
<b>Length</b>	15 weeks	<b>Pre-requisite</b>	None
<b>Contact hours</b>	42 hours	<b>Grading</b>	BA/MA Elective

### 1. Course Description

This course aims to provide students with a firm grounding in the history of the Modern Middle East through a concentrated study of the Ottoman and post-Ottoman and Qajar and post-Qajar territories through the prism of the ideas and debates that frame modernity, reform, revolution, colonialism, and nationalism. The learning objectives are achieved through lectures, the interpretation of primary and secondary sources, and self-guided independent inquiry in this co-created learning environment that privileges nuance over generalizations and a case-study and thematic approach over grand narratives.

### 2. Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Understand key concepts that frame discussions about the Middle East (e.g., modernity).
- Be familiar with the historiographical and paradigmatic developments that have impacted studies of the history of the Middle East.
- Critically engage with debates surrounding the nineteenth-century history of the Middle East and to ascertain their relevance to the contemporary world, in verbal and written form.

### 3. Reading Material

The weekly readings are accessible in PDF or link form in the "Resources" folder of your e-learning platform (mylearning.aauni.edu). Students are expected to be able to navigate databases and retrieve resources for further research on their own.

#### **Required Materials**

- Abu-Manneh, Butrus. "The Islamic Roots of the Gülhane Rescript." *Die Welt des Islams* 34 (1994): 173-203.
- Behrooz, Maziar. *Iran at War: Interactions with the Modern World and the Struggle with Imperial Russia*. London: IB Tauris, 2023. [Perlego](#).
- Berberian, Hourii. "Connected Revolutions: Armenians and the Russian, Ottoman, and Iranian Revolutions in the Early Twentieth Century." *L'ivresse de la liberté: La révolution de 1908 dans l'Empire ottoman*. Paris: Peeters, 2012.

- Deringil, Selim. "Legitimacy Structures in the Ottoman State: the Reign of Abdülhamid II." *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 23:3 (1991), pp. 345-359.
- Ferguson, Susanna. *Labors of Love: Gender, Capitalism, and Democracy in Modern Arab Thought*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2024. [Perlego](#). Chapter 3: Childrearing as Embodied Labor.
- Kayalı, Hasan. *Imperial Resilience: the Great War's End, Ottoman Longevity, and Incidental Nations*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2021.
- Mahfouz, Naguib. [Midaq Alley](#). Trans. Trevor Le Gassick. Cairo: Cairo Press, 1989.
- Rabi, Uzi, and Nugzar Ter-Oganov. "The Russian Military Mission and the Birth of the Persian Cossack Brigade: 1879–1894." *Iranian Studies* 42, no. 3 (2009): 445–63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00210860902907396>.
- Williams, Elizabeth R. *States of Cultivation: Imperial Transition and Scientific Agriculture in the Eastern Mediterranean*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2023.
- Yeşil, Fatih. "Drill and Discipline as a Civilizing Process: The Genesis of the Modern Soldier in the Ottoman Empire, 1789–1826". In *Ottoman War and Peace*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2019) doi: [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004413146\\_007](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004413146_007)
- Yılmaz, Hüseyin. "From *Serbestiyet* to *Hürriyet*: Ottoman Statesmen and the Question of Freedom during the Late Enlightenment." *Studia Islamica*, vol. 111, no. 2, 2016, pp. 202–30. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26378308>

#### Recommended Materials

- Tucker, Ernest. *The Middle East in Modern World History*. London: Routledge, 2019. <https://www.perlego.com/book/1544882>.

#### 4. Teaching methodology

The course adheres to different formats before and after the midterm break. We will adhere to a survey approach to cover the history of the region until the post-war settlements in the first half of the class and transitions to a thematic approach and independent inquiry, research methods, and presentations in the second half of the course. Both formats will integrate the active interpretation of primary and secondary sources. The primary and secondary sources will first be discussed in small groups and then by the class at large. There is a presentation aspect to the group component.

#### 5. Course Schedule

Date	Class Agenda
<p><b>Session 1</b></p> <p>4 Feb.</p>	<p><b>Topic:</b> Introductions, course expectations, class rules.</p> <p><b>Description:</b> We will go over the syllabus and course expectations, discuss classroom etiquette, and then proceed to defining our terms and providing a background to the "Modern" "Middle East."</p> <p><b>Assignments/deadlines:</b> Sign up for presentations; syllabus quiz, play <i>Hajj Trail</i>.</p>
<p><b>Session 2</b></p> <p>No class 11 Feb.</p>	<p><b>Topic:</b> Freedom from an Interdisciplinary Perspective</p> <p><b>Description:</b> There is no class on 11 February. Please attend at least one session of the "Freedom Colloquium" that will be held on campus on 19 February and write a +500-word reflection (+750 for MA students). The reflection must be in dialogue with the assigned reading.</p>

<p>Make-up: 19 Feb.</p>	<p><b>Reading:</b> Yılmaz, Hüseyin. "From <i>Serbestiyet to Hürriyet</i>: Ottoman Statesmen and the Question of Freedom during the Late Enlightenment." <i>Studia Islamica</i>, vol. 111, no. 2, 2016, pp. 202–30.</p> <p><b>Assignments/deadlines:</b> Reflection paper due 24 February 2026, 23:59; <i>Midaq Alley</i>, Ch. 1-4 reflection.</p>
<p><b>Session 3</b> 18 Feb.</p>	<p><b>Topic:</b> At the Dawn of the Nineteenth Century</p> <p><b>Description:</b> Politics and geopolitics; encroachments and a New Order. Conceptual history and the question of origins (e.g. justice and equality).</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Abu-Manneh, Butrus. "The Islamic Roots of the Gülhane Rescript." <i>Die Welt des Islams</i> 34 (1994), pp. 173-203; Behrooz, Maziar. <i>Iran at War: Interactions with the Modern World and the Struggle with Imperial Russia</i>. London: IB Tauris, 2023. <a href="#">Perlego</a>. Chapter 2: Iran: State and Society in the Early Nineteenth Century.</p> <p><b>Assignments/deadlines:</b> Culture in the ME, <i>Midaq Alley</i>, Ch. 5-8 reflection.</p>
<p><b>Session 4</b> 25 Feb.</p>	<p><b>Topic:</b> A "New Order," Part I: Ottoman</p> <p><b>Description:</b> The "Impact of the West" and early reform efforts in the Ottoman Empire.</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Yeşil, Fatih. "Drill and Discipline as a Civilizing Process: The Genesis of the Modern Soldier in the Ottoman Empire, 1789–1826". In <i>Ottoman War and Peace</i>, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2019).</p> <p><b>Assignments/deadlines:</b> Culture in the ME, <i>Midaq Alley</i>, Ch. 9-12 reflection.</p>
<p><b>Session 5</b> 4 Mar.</p>	<p><b>Topic:</b> A New Order, Part II: Qajar</p> <p><b>Description:</b> The "Impact of the West" and early reform efforts in the Qajar Empire.</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Rabi, Uzi, and Nugzar Ter-Oganov. "The Russian Military Mission and the Birth of the Persian Cossack Brigade: 1879–1894." <i>Iranian Studies</i> 42, no. 3 (2009): 445–63.</p> <p><b>Assignments/deadlines:</b> Culture in the ME; <i>Midaq Alley</i>, Ch. 13-16 reflection.</p>
<p><b>Session 6</b></p>	<p><b>Topic:</b> Guest Lecture</p>

<p>11 Mar.</p>	<p><b>Reading:</b> TBA  <b>Assignments/deadlines:</b> Culture in the ME; <i>Midaq Alley</i> Ch. 17-20 reflection; research pitch due by 11:59PM (Turnitin).</p>
<p><b>Session 7</b>  18 Mar.</p>	<p><b>Topic:</b> Constitutionalism, Absolutism, Revolution</p> <p><b>Description:</b> Modernization, administrative reform and reorganization, centralization, under constitutionalist and absolutist frameworks in the Ottoman and Qajar empire.</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Berberian, Hourii. "Connected Revolutions: Armenians and the Russian, Ottoman, and Iranian Revolutions in the Early Twentieth Century." <i>L'ivresse de la liberté" La révolution de 1908 dans l'Empire ottoman</i>. Paris: Peeters, 2012.</p> <p><b>Assignments/deadlines:</b> Culture in the ME; <i>Midaq Alley</i> Ch. 21-24 reflection.</p>
<p><b>Session 8</b>  25 Mar.</p>	<p><b>Topic:</b> World War I and the Making of the Modern Middle East</p> <p><b>Description:</b> Ottoman and Qajar empires in World War I, wartime promises, post-war settlements, the mandate system.</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Kayali, Hasan. <i>Imperial Resilience: the Great War's End, Ottoman Longevity, and Incidental Nations</i>. Oakland: University of California Press, 2021. <a href="#">Perlego</a>. Chapter 4: State Transformations: Anatolian Movement and the Fertile Crescent, 1920-1922.</p> <p><b>Assignments/deadlines:</b> Culture in the ME; <i>Midaq Alley</i>, Ch. 25-28 reflection; annotated bibliography due by midnight (23:59 CET, 25 March 2026)</p>
<p><b>Spring Break!</b></p>	<p><b>No Class – Enjoy your Spring Break! Relax and Reset.</b></p>
<p><b>Session 9</b>  8 Apr.</p>	<p><b>Topic:</b> Midterm Exam</p> <p><b>Description:</b> Map quiz, multiple choice, short answer, essay. The exam covers lectures, student presentations, the primary and secondary source readings, and <i>Midaq Alley</i>. It will be pen and paper in class.</p>
<p><b>Session 10</b>  15 Apr.</p>	<p><b>Topic:</b> An Environmental History of the Modern Middle East</p> <p><b>Description:</b> Alternative approaches to the history of the Modern Middle East.</p>

	<p><b>Reading:</b> Williams, Elizabeth R. <i>States of Cultivation: Imperial Transition and Scientific Agriculture in the Eastern Mediterranean</i>. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2023. <a href="#">Perlego</a>. Chapter 5: Of Mice, Sunn Bugs, Drought, and Taxation.</p> <p><b>Assignments/deadlines:</b> Culture in the ME; <i>Midaq Alley</i>, Ch. 29-31 reflection.</p>
<p><b>Session 11</b> 22 Apr.</p>	<p><b>Topic:</b> A Capitalist History of the Modern Middle East</p> <p><b>Description:</b> Alternative approaches to the history of Modern Middle East</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Ferguson, Susanna. <i>Labors of Love: Gender, Capitalism, and Democracy in Modern Arab Thought</i>. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2024. <a href="#">Perlego</a>. Chapter 3: Childrearing as Embodied Labor.</p> <p><b>Assignments/deadlines:</b> Culture in the ME; <i>Midaq Alley</i>, Ch. 31-35 reflection.</p>
<p><b>Session 12</b> 29 Apr.</p>	<p><b>Topic:</b> Culminating Experience Presentations</p> <p><b>Description:</b> You will present your culminating experience presentations – your argument, method, and progress-update, and open it up for class feedback.</p> <p><b>Assignments/deadlines:</b> Culture in the ME.</p>
<p><b>Session 13</b> 6 May</p>	<p><b>Topic:</b> Culminating Experience Presentations</p> <p><b>Description:</b> You will present your culminating experience presentations – your argument, method, and progress-update, and open it up for class feedback.</p> <p><b>Assignments/deadlines:</b> Culture in the ME.</p>
<p><b>Session 14</b> 13 May</p>	<p><b>Topic:</b> Translatability, Transferability, Universality</p> <p><b>Description:</b> <i>Midaq Alley</i> (1995).</p> <p><b>Assignments/deadlines:</b> Culminating Experience Papers due 15 May 2026, 11:59 CET (13 May 2026).</p>

## 6. Course Requirements and Assessment (with estimated workloads)

Assignment	Workload (hours)	Weight in Final Grade	Evaluated Course Specific Learning Outcomes	Evaluated Institutional Learning Outcomes*
Class Participation	42	15%	Contributing to the collective learning environment.	2
Syllabus Quiz	3	5%	Demonstrating investment in the course.	3
Research Pitch	5	5%	Formulating a research design.	3
Midterm	20	30%	Application of knowledge, historical analysis, argumentation and writing.	1, 2, 3
Culture	15	5%	Critical reflection	1, 2
Reading Reflections	15	5%	Critical reflection	1
Annotated Bibliography	15	10%	Evidence and research design.	1, 3
Research Presentation	10	5%	Oral communication and argumentation	1, 2
Research Paper	25	20%	Writing, historical analysis, critical thinking.	1, 2, 3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>		

\*1 = Critical Thinking; 2 = Effective Communication; 3 = Effective and Responsible Action

## 7. Detailed description of the assignments

### **Assignment 1:** Class participation

Students ought to come to class on time, prepared, and ready to take part in conversations about the course material in an active, engaged, and respectful manner. Phones must be silenced and out of sight. It is expected that students pay attention to their classmates' presentations.

### **Assessment breakdown**

Assessed area	Percentage
Presence and punctuality	80
Active co-creation of a safe and rewarding learning environment	10
Presentation sign-up and commitment to presentation sign-up date	5
Freedom colloquium reflection	5

**Assignment 2:** Syllabus Quiz – 4 February 2026, during regular class hours.

All late assignments will get a 5% deduction on the first day and 2% each day thereafter.

### **Assessment breakdown**

Assessed area	Percentage
10 Questions – easy breezy.	100

**Assignment:** Research pitch – 11 March 2026, by 11:59 PM CET (Turnitin)

This is a 200-word abstract of a topic you want to pursue in the post-WWI Middle East. IT should include a research question, your approach to answering it, and a statement of relevance/significance.

All late assignments will get a 5% deduction on the first day and 2% each day thereafter.

**Assessment breakdown**

Assessed area	Percentage
Title	5
Research topic, context, scope	25
Research question	15
Statement of relevance	20
Approach	15
Format and adherence to academic guidelines	20

**Assignment:** Midterm – 8 April 2026, regular class hours.

The midterm exam will be composed of multiple-choice questions, short-answer questions, and an essay. The material will include lectures, student presentations, primary and secondary source readings, as well as *Midaq Alley*.

All late assignments will get a 5% deduction on the first day and 2% each day thereafter.

**Assessment breakdown**

Assessed area	Percentage
Multiple choice and identification	25
Short answer	30
Essay	45

**Assignment:** Culture – ongoing.

These are group presentations on culture and/or tradition in the “Middle East.” The presentations must evidence an equal distribution of labor and coherence. Length: 10-12 minutes, followed by a 5–10-minute discussion.

All late assignments will get a 5% deduction on the first day and 2% each day thereafter.

**Assessment breakdown**

Assessed area	Percentage
Content and understanding	30
Analysis and critical thinking	30
Presentation and communication	10
Engagement of audience and discussion questions	10
Presentation length	5
Collaboration and self-evaluation	15

**Assignment:** Reflections – ongoing.

Be prepared to be prompted to write reflections on *Midaq Alley* and the game *Hajj Trail* during the class sessions.

All late assignments will get a 5% deduction on the first day and 2% each day thereafter.

**Assessment breakdown**

Assessed area	Percentage
Evidence of active reading and critical thinking	100

**Assignment:** Annotated bibliography – due by 11:59 CET on 25 March 2026 (Turnitin).

Prepare an annotated bibliography that pertains to your research question and discuss its relevance in a clear, coherent, and analytical manner. 5-8 sources for undergrads and 8-10 sources for graduate students (INDICATE WHICH YOU ARE IN THE TITLE PAGE). Please use the Chicago citation style.

All late assignments will get a 5% deduction on the first day and 2% each day thereafter.

#### **Assessment breakdown**

<b>Assessed area</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Source selection and relevance	30
Summary and accuracy	30
Critical thinking	25
Style, format, and adherence to academic guidelines	15

**Assignment:** Culminating Experience Research Presentation – 29 April and 6 May in class.

The research paper will allow you to present your research to the class (the presentation will last about 10-12 minutes) and get constructive feedback on it. You are expected to demonstrate relative fluency in the topic, its history, its significance, and the existing literature on it.

All late assignments will get a 5% deduction on the first day and 2% each day thereafter.

#### **Assessment breakdown**

<b>Assessed area</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Content and understanding	30
Analysis and critical thinking	30
Presentation and communication	10
Engagement of audience and discussion questions	10
Presentation length	5
Collaboration and self-evaluation	15

**Assignment:** Culminating Experience Research Paper – 15 May 2026, 11:59 PM CET.

The culminating experience research paper is the end product of the labor you have been investing into your research question on the Modern Middle East since the submission of your annotated bibliography assignment. It ought to be critical, analytical, and original. 2,500 words for undergraduate students and 3,000 words for graduate students (INDICATE WHICH YOU ARE IN THE TITLE PAGE). Please use a proper citation format (Chicago) and include a bibliography.

All late assignments will get a 5% deduction on the first day and 2% each day thereafter.

#### **Assessment breakdown**

<b>Assessed area</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Argument and research question	25
Use of sources and evidence	25
Analysis and critical thinking	25
Style, format, and adherence to academic guidelines	15
On time and correct length	5

## 8. General Requirements and School Policies

### General requirements

All coursework is governed by AAU's academic rules. Students are expected to be familiar with the academic rules in the Academic Codex and Student Handbook and to maintain the highest standards of honesty and academic integrity in their work. Please see the AAU intranet for a [summary of key policies](#) regarding coursework.

### Course-specific requirements

There are no special requirements or deviations from AAU policies for this course.

## 9. Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Percentage*	Description
A	95 – 100	<b>Excellent performance.</b> The student has shown originality and displayed an exceptional grasp of the material and a deep analytical understanding of the subject.
A-	90 – 94	
B+	87 – 89	<b>Good performance.</b> The student has mastered the material, understands the subject well and has shown some originality of thought and/or considerable effort.
B	83 – 86	
B-	80 – 82	
C+	77 – 79	<b>Fair performance.</b> The student has acquired an acceptable understanding of the material and essential subject matter of the course, but has not succeeded in translating this understanding into consistently creative or original work.
C	73 – 76	
C-	70 – 72	
D+	65 – 69	<b>Poor.</b> The student has shown some understanding of the material and subject matter covered during the course. The student's work, however, has not shown enough effort or understanding to allow for a passing grade in School Required Courses. It does qualify as a passing mark for the General College Courses and Electives.
D	60 – 64	
F	0 – 59	<b>Fail.</b> The student has not succeeded in mastering the subject matter covered in the course.

\* Decimals should be rounded to the nearest whole number.

**Prepared by and when:** Dr Ebru Akcasu, 29 Jan 2026

**Approved by and when:** Dr Silviya Lechner, 30 Jan 2026