ECONOMIC HISTORY AND MODERNIZATION
OF THE ISLAMIC MIDDLE EAST
Duke University
Economics 195S.44, Political Science 199BS.44

Fall 2007
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Objectives

This course offers an introduction to the economic history of the Middle East from the advent of Islam fourteen centuries ago to the modern era. It has four main objectives. First of all, it will familiarize you with the institutions that have governed the pace and characteristics of economic development in the region. Second, it will examine particular transformations and selected cases of inertia to derive lessons about the mechanisms that govern economic development and modernization in general. As such, it will provide insights applicable to other regions of the world, in both the past and present. Third, the course will investigate how religion shaped the region’s economic transformation; in particular, it will identify the mechanisms through which Islam may have contributed to specific historical patterns, including periods of economic dynamism and the region’s slip, around the 18th century, into a state of economic underdevelopment from which it has yet to recover. Fourth, the course will identify the social forces driving the contemporary rediscovery and reinterpretation of Islam, partly under the rubric of Islamism, also known as Islamic fundamentalism.

The course is organized around topics that present intellectual puzzles, including ones that have preoccupied scholars for generations. Within each topic the goal is to learn not just what happened but also, and more important, why the region’s economic history unfolded as it did. In other words, the emphasis is on analysis rather than description. In pursuit of our analytical goal, we will draw comparisons with other parts of the world, including western Europe, the Indian subcontinent, and East Asia.
Class sessions

We will meet twice a week. Although attendance is not mandatory, regular attendance is essential to success in the course. Because there is no main textbook, only by attending lectures regularly, and participating in discussions, will you be able to master the topics to be discussed. In any case, the lectures and discussion will go beyond the readings, and they will contain ideas unavailable through published sources. By the same token, keeping up with the readings is essential to following the lectures. The lectures cannot cover everything discussed in assigned readings, and I will assume that you have read and understood the reading assignments.

Discussion and debate enhances the learning process, so students are encouraged to ask questions and offer opinions. I will often start a topic, in fact, by challenging the class to anticipate key mechanisms, relationships, or outcomes, or to suggest analytical approaches to cracking the historical puzzle at hand. At times, it may be necessary to limit discussion in the interest of maintaining the pace of the course and covering key concepts. When we are short of time, and multiple students want to speak, those who have spoken less will have priority.

Audiotaping or videotaping of the class sessions is not allowed.

Prerequisite, exams, grading

Economic Principles (Econ 51D) is a prerequisite for this course. Requirements include an in-class midterm exam (October 10), a final examination (December 16, 7-10 PM), and a 15-page paper due before reading period, on December 7. The course grade will be based on a weighted average of the tests, paper, and class performance: \((0.20) \text{ (midterm grade)} + (0.40) \text{ (final grade)} + (0.30) \text{ (paper grade)} + (0.10) \text{ (classroom performance)}\).

Taking the exams is mandatory. The time of the tests cannot be moved for anyone, except for a documented grave emergency (e.g., death in the family, hospitalization, illness requiring immediate attention of a physician). Unacceptable excuses for missing a test include: athletic function, malfunctioning automobile, job interview, temperamental alarm clock, non-refundable airline ticket, and uncooperative weather. Special arrangements may be made for disabled students working through Disabilities Services (668-1267).

Exams will be graded with care for analytical sophistication, originality, accuracy, coherence, clarity, and comprehensiveness. No credit will be given for repeating a question, and penalties will be imposed for invoking facts or theories irrelevant to the question at hand. Requests for regrading will be accepted, but only if accompanied by a clear and written justification for the request. Regrading will not be limited to the specific question whose scoring is being challenged. The entire exam will be regraded, and the exam score may go up or down.
Readings

Few textbooks have been written on the economic history of the Middle East, and those in print, though useful, are insufficiently analytical for the purposes of this course. Most of the selected readings thus consist of journal articles and book chapters, of which most are included in a reader available through the Duke Textbook Store. Four books, each of which we shall cover in part, are also available at the Textbook Store: El-Gamal, *Islamic Finance: Law, Economics, and Practice*; Kuran, *Islam and Mammon: The Economic Predicaments of Islamism*; Lewis, *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and the Middle Eastern Response*; and Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy, 1800-1914*.

Authors of the readings include not only economists but also political scientists, legal scholars, and historians. The readings have been selected partly to familiarize you with a variety of research techniques used to study the past: (1) archival data collection, (2) empirical testing, (3) textual criticism, and especially (4) institutional analysis.

Certain readings will address politically controversial and socially sensitive issues from multiple angles. Within the time constraints of the course, you will gain exposure to competing perspectives through influential writings of their leading exponents.

The required readings are starred. The rest are highly recommended. Depending on student interest, minor adjustments may be made to this reading list.

Course outline

I. PUZZLES OF MIDDLE EASTERN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT


II. MEDIEVAL MIDDLE EASTERN ECONOMY


III. INSTITUTIONAL STAGNATION: TRADE AND FINANCE


IV. CHOICE OF LAW: ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES


*Ronald C. Jennings, “Loans and Credit in early 17th Century Ottoman Judicial Records: the Sharia Court of Anatolian Kayseri,” in *Studies in Ottoman Social History in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Istanbul: ISIS Press, 1999), pp. 201-46. [Note: fine-printed pages with additional cases omitted from reader]


**V. PROVISION OF PUBLIC GOODS: STATIC AND DYNAMIC EFFECTS**


**VI. PROPERTY RIGHTS AND RULE OF LAW**


*Suraiya Faroqhi, “Finances,” in *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1914*, edited by Halil İnalcık with Donald Quataert (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 531-44.


**VII. INSTITUTIONAL MODERNIZATION**


VIII. THE ECONOMIC AGENDA OF CONTEMPORARY ISLAMISM


