

University of Florida

British Palestine, 1917-1948

JST3930 / ASH3931 / REL3938

Spring 2026

MWF 8 (3:00 PM – 3:50 PM)

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Office hours: Wednesday 4:30pm-5:30pm and by appointment

Zoom meeting also available

Course description

Shaped primarily by British imperial interests after the first World War, British controlled Palestine underwent rapid and consequential changes in the span of three decades. A focal point of religious sentiments and budding national aspirations, it moved rapidly towards open conflict which the British failed to contain. British Palestine offers a case study of imperial interventions, religious and denominational rivalries, overlapping national and colonial projects, regional entanglements and international political and legal innovations. This course follows British imperial interventions, Arab and Jewish responses, initiatives and transformations, state and nation building projects, demographic shifts and crises, and conflict escalation. Conflicting narratives and claims, and long protracted regional conflicts, form part of the legacy of the period and manifest in extensive and detailed research in multiple fields, continuously re-examined and contested.

Course objectives

- Study the major events during the mandate period, their background and context.
- Gain an understanding of rapid political, social, cultural and economic developments and dynamics.
- Gain an understanding of regional and global political, economic, social, cultural and religious interactions.
- Gain knowledge of the workings of a modern imperial state, and the relationships between imperial institutions, centers, colonies, outposts and holdings.
- Develop familiarity with competitions and rivalries between world powers in the past century.
- Examine the development of a multilevel protracted conflict from the local to the regional and global spheres.
- Explore a saturated field of historiographical and analytical research, the proliferation and persistence of approaches, and the continuous search for new angles for research.

Student learning outcomes

- Students will be able to:
 - ✓ identify the main developments in the British period in Palestine and locate them in historical context.
 - ✓ identify turning points and fit the mandate period in Palestine within wider historical timelines.
 - ✓ evaluate and contextualize statements about the history of Palestine and its regional interactions in the period.
 - ✓ explain the geo-political context of the Middle East in the context of the period and topics discussed.
- Students will be familiar with the conceptual frameworks of imperial structures, geo-political rivalries, modern national projects and ethno-religious conflicts.

W	Topics	Readings
1	Introduction	
2	Background	Chronologies
		The Holy Land
		Ottoman contexts
3	The British Empire	Imperial interests, policies and practices
4	WWI and the conquest of Palestine	Background of the war
		The place of Palestine in the war
		From Egypt to Syria – the campaign over Palestine
5	Promises and Expectations	Arabs and the McMahon-Hussein Correspondence
		Jews and the Balfour Declaration
		France, Russia and the Sykes-Picot Agreement
6	Post WWI Arrangements	The military administration
		Carving up borders in the Middle East
7	Mandate over Palestine	International expectations and constraints- U.S., Wilson and the League of Nations
		The mandate system and the formation of the Mandate over Palestine
8	The developing political landscape	The Ottoman legacy
		Jewish national movements and nation-building
		Arab national movements and nation-building
		Political & imperial subversion efforts (France, Turkey, Italy, Germany, Russia)
9	1918-1929	Kramer ch.8-10; Cohen, ch.4-9; Shepherd, ch.2; Hyamson, ch.10
10	1929-1939	Kramer, ch.11-12; Cohen, ch.10-13; Shepherd, ch. 3-4; Burbank & Cooper, ch.12; Sheffer; Hyamson, ch.11
11	1939-1948	Kramer, ch.13; Cohen, ch.19-20; Shepherd, ch.5; Burbank & Cooper, ch.13. <i>Optional:</i> Darwin, ch.12; Hyamson, ch.12
12	Parallel and exclusionary trajectories	British
		Jewish
		Arab
		Zero-Sum Game vs. entanglements
13	The legacy of British rule and Mandate years	Infrastructure and economy
		Political and social patterns
		National and religious conflicts
		Ideologies, narratives and historiographies
14	Conclusion	

Readings

Carly Beckerman, *Unexpected State: British Politics and the Creation of Israel* (Indiana University Press, 2020).

Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010).

Michael J. Cohen, *Britain's Moment in Palestine: Retrospect and Perspectives, 1917-1948* (Routledge, 2014).

John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830-1970* (Cambridge, 2009).

Adeed Dawisha, *Arab nationalism in the twentieth century: from triumph to despair* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016),

Eran Dolev, Yigal Sheffy, Haim Goren, eds., *Palestine and World War I: Grand Strategy, Military Tactics and Culture in War* (London & New York: I. B. Tauris, 2014).

Roza El-Eini, *Mandated Landscape: British Imperial Rule in Palestine 1929-1948* (Routledge, 2005).

David Engel, *Zionism* (London: Routledge, 2009).

Robert Gerwarth, Erez Manela, eds., *Empires at War: 1911-1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Zeina B. Ghandour, *A Discourse on Domination in Mandate Palestine: Imperialism, Property and Insurgency* (Routledge, 2010).

Albert M. Hyamson, *Palestine under the Mandate, 1920-1948* (London: Methuen, 1950; Reprinted 1976).

Abigail Jacobson and Moshe Naor, *Oriental Neighbors: Middle Eastern Jews and Arabs in Mandatory Palestine* (Brandeis University Press, 2016).

Charles S. Kamen, *Little Common Ground: Arab Agriculture and Jewish Settlement in Palestine, 1920-1948* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991).

Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (Columbia University Press, 2009).

Gudrun Krämer, *A History of Palestine: From the Ottoman Conquest to the Founding of the State of Israel* (Princeton University Press, 2011).

Ann Mosely Lesch, *Arab Politics in Palestine, 1917-39: Frustration of a Nationalist Movement* (Cornell University Press, 1979).

Nele Matz, "Civilization and the Mandate System under the League of Nations as Origin of Trusteeship", *Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law*, Volume 9, 2005, pp. 47-95.

Arie Morgenstern, "Dispersion and the Longing for Zion, 1240-1840", *Azur 12* (2002), pp. 71-132.

Timothy H. Parsons, *The British Imperial Century, 1815-1914: A World History Perspective*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999).

Yehoshua Porath, *The Emergence of the Palestinian-Arab National Movement*, 2 vols.: Vol. I: 1918-1929, Vol. II: 1929-1939 (London: Frank Cass, 1974, 1977).

Nicholas E. Roberts, "Re-Remembering the Mandate: Historiographical Debates and Revisionist History in the Study of British Palestine," *History Compass* 9:3 (2011), pp. 215-230.

Cyrus Schayegh and Andrew Arsan, *The Routledge Handbook of the History of the Middle East Mandates* (Routledge, 2015).

Anita Shapira, *Israel: A History* (Brandeis, 2012)

Gabriel Sheffer, "British Colonial Policy-Making Towards Palestine (1929-1939)", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 14: No. 3 (Oct. 1978), pp. 307-322.

Naomi Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand: British Rule in Palestine 1917-1948* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000).

A. J. Sherman, *Mandate Days: British Lives in Palestine, 1918-1948* (New York, 1998).

Peter Sluglett, "British archival sources for the history of the Middle Eastern mandates", in: Nadine Méouchy and Peter Sluglett, eds., *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspectives* (Brill, 2004), pp. 55-61.

Kenneth W. Stein, *The Land Question in Palestine, 1917-1939* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

Bernard Wasserstein, *The British in Palestine: the mandatory government and the Arab-Jewish conflict, 1917-1929* (1978, 1991).

* Original documents and additional short texts will be incorporated in class discussions.

Grading

Attendance and active participation: 36

Weekly assignments: 36

Take-home Midterm and Final: 36+36

(Extra points for excellent contributions and work)

Weekly assignments

Weekly assignments will be discussed in class and a list will be available on Canvas.

Please submit by Tuesday. Detailed instructions for the assignments will be provided in class / on Canvas.

Midterm and Final

Detailed instructions and dates will be provided in class and on Canvas.

Syllabus Changes

The syllabus is subject to change. Changes will be announced in advance as much as possible. 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 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 3 undocumented absences, after which any unexcused absence will affect your grade. 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. Email or Canvas messages are the preferred form of communication (I am usually away from the phone). I will usually see your message within 2 working days.

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.

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				

UF academic policies and resources

<https://syllabus.ufl.edu/syllabus-policy/uf-syllabus-policy-links/>

Technical issues

To resolve technical issues visit the UF helpdesk website: <https://it.ufl.edu/helpdesk/>, or call 352-392-4357.