GEOG 30606 - Middle East and North Africa (MENA):
From the Natufians to Masdar City through the Arab Spring
Monday and Wednesday, 11:40 AM to 2:48 PM
HN 1022
Summer 2014

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Office hours: by appointment; (after class in room HN1032)
Required prerequisite: GEOG 150 World Regional Geography or instructor permission
BlackBoard web site: https://bbhosted.cuny.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp

Course Description: From the first Sumerians who settled in Mesopotamia to the convulsive movements of the Arab Spring that are shaking the foundations of some Middle East and North African nation-states, through the Egyptian civilization and the Persian and Ottoman empires, the Middle East and North African region (MENA) represents one of the oldest and most vital developments in human civilization. However, this region has been frequently misrepresented through preconceived notions and stereotypes as a territory of deserts, oasis, Tuaregs and Bedouins, oil, and unfortunately, social and political conflicts and terrorism. Under a radical geographical perspective, this course will enable you, the student, to see this region in a new light that highlights this territory as the rich and complex cultural landscape that has extraordinarily influenced the rest of the world with their cultural, political, ideological, and scientific achievements. Through this semester your will learn that the MENA region is the place of origin of the first cities such as Ur and other incredible urban centers such as Babylon, Persepolis, Alexandria, Istanbul, Bagdad or the modern Dubai. This is also the region that created the enigmatic number “0”, so crucial for our current computing operations and the concept of the infinite; developed our current numerical system; elaborated the main three monotheist religions; and finally, implemented crucial engineering and technological innovations such as dams, colossal constructions such as the Giza Pyramids, the Suez Canal, and the High Aswan Dam.

Required Texts:

Course Objectives and Outcomes:
You will learn to think critically about the complexities of the MENA region, especially the intersections between culture, socio-political, economy, and ecology. You will be encouraged to
analyze this region from an ecological perspective that amalgams culture and nature as a unite. Secondly, you will examine preconceived notions and stereotypes including social, political and geographical ones, and understand most of them as social constructions. Your ability to analyze critically these interactions will be assessed through your participation in class and Blackboard, short essays, and exams.

**Course Requirements.** This course will be based upon:
1. **Mid-term exam** (30 % of final grade). The mid-term will be composed of analytical short essays and multiple-choice questions.
2. **Final exam** (30 % of final grade). The final exam will be composed of analytical short essays and multiple-choice questions.
3. **Paper** (30% of final grade). Every student will write a 5-page (double-spaced) paper of a topic related to the MENA Region.
4. **Paper presentation** (5% of the final grade).
5. **In-class participation** (5% of final grade). Participation is fundamental for your success in this class and includes all of the following: class discussion, blackboard participation, group activities, museum visits (e.g. the Metropolitan Museum of Art), and attendance.

**Attendance and Punctuality Policy:**
At Hunter College low attendance could mean a decrease your final grade. In fact, in the case of excessive absence, the instructor has the option to lower the grade or assign an “F” or “WU” grade. Finally, tardiness generates constant interruptions of the class. Continuous tardiness could generate a reduction of points for the final grade. **DO NOT BE LATE TO CLASS.**

**Hunter College Policy of Academic Integrity:**
Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The College is committed to enforcing CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures. Plagiarism, dishonesty, or cheating in any portion of the work required for this course will be punished to the full extent allowed according to Hunter College regulations.

Being in college requires discipline, collegiality, and overall honesty. Although knowledge is an accumulation of ideas from different people and epochs that you can use, you have to do so under certain conditions. If you are going to use another’s ideas you have to identify their names and works. If you don’t, it is called “plagiarism,” and that is illegal. Plagiarism is the presentation of someone else’s ideas, words or artistic, scientific, or technical work as one’s own. Using the idea or work of another is permissible only when the original author is identified. Paraphrasing and summarizing, as well as direct quotations, require citations of the original source. Plagiarism may be intentional or unintentional. Lack of dishonest intent does not necessarily absolve a student of responsibility for plagiarism. Students who are unsure of how and when to provide documentation are advised to consult with their instructors. The library has guides designed to help students to appropriately identify a cited work. The full policy can be found on Hunter’s website, www.hunter.cuny.edu. For further information on integrity and behavior, please consult the college bulletin.
ADA Policy:
In compliance with the American Disability Act of 1990 (ADA) and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Hunter College is committed to ensuring educational parity and accommodations for all students with documented disabilities and/or medical conditions. It is recommended that all students with documented disabilities (Emotional, Medical, Physical, and/or Learning) consult the Office of Accessibility, located in Room E1214B, to secure necessary academic accommodations. For further information and assistance, please call: (212) 772-4857 or (212) 650-3230.

Course Contents and Calendar:
Part I: The Concept of Middle East and the Biogeographical and Demographic Background of the MENA Region (June 2nd, 4th, and 9th):
- Introduction to the course
- Biogeographical background: Climatic factors (latitude, altitude, continentality, proximity to water bodies, oceanic and atmospheric dynamics). Biogeographic Regions in the Middle East. Tectonics, geomorphology, mountain and coastal processes. Watersheds. Climate change and the future of this region.
- The Economic dimension of the MENA countries
  Read pages 157-167 from chapter 6 in Fundamentals of World Regional Geography. Read pages 209-213 from chapter 6 in World Regional Geography Concepts.

Part II: Urban Historical Development and a Brief History of the MENA Area (June 9th and June 11th):


**Watch “Arab Spring” in Aljazeera America (2014) in [http://america.aljazeera.com/search.html?q=Arab+Spring](http://america.aljazeera.com/search.html?q=Arab+Spring).**


**Part III: PostColonial Consequences (June 16th and June 18th):**

- **The Dissolution of the Ottoman Empire.** Watch the film *Lawrence of Arabia* by David Lean (1962).
- **War in Darfur.** Read “Darfur Conflict: Sudan’s Bloody Stalemate by James Copnall” (2013) in *BBC*.
- **Iraq War and U.S. Colonial Intervention.** Read “Iraq War” in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

**Part IV: Mythologies, Religions, and Beliefs: From the Abrahamic Religions to Zoroastrianism (June 18th June 23rd):**


- **Monastic communities in the desert.** Read *The Essenes, Dead Sea Scroll 'authors,' never existed* and *The Digital Dea Sea Scrolls*. The Israel Museum of Jerusalem in http://dss collections.imj.org.il/

- **Mysticism, Sufies, Dervishes of the Mevlevi order and Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rumi.** Read Rumi’s poems in http://www.poemhunter.com/mewlana-jalaluddin-rumi/poems/page-1/?a=a&l=1&y=

- **Hydraulic-Technological Strategies:** Traditional irrigation communities (*Huertas* in Syria and the Atlas Mountains), the invention of foggaras, qanats, dams, canals, and the Nabatean water culture in the desert. Read chapter 3: “Ancient Civilizations”

**MID-TERM June 25th**

**Part V: Technological Inventions: From the Imagination of Nothing to the Construction of the First Dams through the Creation of the Modern Alphabetic System (June 25th and June 30th):**


- **The Conquest of the Indian Ocean and Its Monsoons: Sindbad the Seaman, ancient sailing techniques, the monsoon, the first Europeans, Ferdinand Lesseps and the Suez Canal Impact, and the Conquest of the Indian Ocean.**

- **Semitic tribes and our writing system.** Read *The Invention and Development of the Alphabet* by Joseph Lam in https://www.academia.edu/341273/The_Invention_and_Development_of_the_Alphabet.
Part VI: Energy and Water Resources and Their Geopolitical Conflicts (June 30th and July 2nd):


Part VII: Water Projects and Their Ecological Impacts (July 2nd and July 7th):


FINAL EXAM JULY 9th