

# *Middle of what? East of Where?*

## **The Middle East Through Travelogues**

**Course:** NEAR E 286 A

**Quarter:** Spring 2020

**Room:** tbd

**Time:** Tuesday & Thursday, 1:30-3:20 PM

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**Office:** 233 Denny Hall | **Office hours:** Tuesday & Thursday tbd (or by appointment)



**Pitch:** What have world travelers to the Middle East written about this region? What have Middle Eastern travelers said about the world under their feet? Join us to find out!

**Description:** *Middle of Where? East of What?* examines travel writings (*rihla* in Arabic, *safar-nāma* in Persian) composed by such famed writers as Mark Twain, Marco Polo, Ibn Battuta, Nasir Khusraw, Ma Huan, Freya Stark, and Gertrude Bell. Categorized as part of “wonder” literature, travel writing derives from a multitude of contexts: pilgrimage, diplomacy, education, adventure, and exile. We will interrogate notions of territorial, ethnic and religious identity and place them in the context of their time. Our critical reading will enable us to scrutinize popular ideas like the “Clash of Civilizations” which presupposes that humans, languages and cultures have a “proper” and “natural” place to which they belong. Instead, we will show that conflict among cultures is not the automatic function of inherent difference, but rather a function of unequal power dynamics and a cultural apparatus designed to mask and justify those power dynamics.

**Required materials:** Course reader to purchase or PDF to be provided.

**Prerequisites:** This course does not require or assume any background in literary studies or Middle Eastern history.

### What will you learn in ten weeks?

- What is travel writing and why it matters to us now?
  - Travel writing is an extremely diverse body of literature. It defies any effort to classify it under a single rubric. Perhaps for this reason, travel writing was undervalued for a long time. Now, there is a renewed appreciation for their worth, in some context as literary texts and in others as historical documents (or both!)
- How do we read travelogues?
  - We will cultivate a set of questions and concepts with which to read each travelogue in a nuanced manner.
- Gaining a more historical understanding of the Middle East as a cultural zone
  - Each travelogue represents the Middle East in a different way. By critically reading these works, we will gain a deeper understanding of this region and what it has meant at different times to different travelers.
  - What are the shared cultural elements that connect travelers to and from the Middle East?
  - What do such terms as “boundary,” “border,” and “mobility” mean in different time periods?
- Debating the relevance of travel literature in our world today
  - Asylum seekers fleeing climate barbarism, state violence, and persecution are doing the most amount of traveling in our world today. In light of that, in what ways can travel writing as a body of literature teach us how to critical rethink the connection between travel and human history?

### How's this course good for your life?

We live in (the final years) of the age of capital market where money —and not collective dignity— dictates human relations. In that light, to come together as a group to form a community of hearts and minds to engage questions that are central to human identity is itself a defiance of and a way of recuperating from the cruelty of the age of capital market.

If that is too broad for you, let me say this: we are not just reading a particular type of writing (travelogues) and focused on a specific region (the Middle East), we are ultimately cultivating critical thinking skills that you will use in your professional and personal life. By critical thinking, I mean the ability to keep our assumptions about certain periods and peoples in check, the ability to identify cultural difference as a product of broader social systems, the ability to approach complex subjects such as national or religious identity not just with intellectual curiosity but also with a wide range of historical understanding and empathy.

<b>How will I evaluate you?:</b>	Participation	15%
	Discussion questions	15%
	Presentations (2)	20%
	Quizzes	25%
	Essays (2)	25%
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	Total	100%

**A** = 99% - 93% | **A-** = 92% - 90% | **B+** = 89% - 87% | **B** = 86% - 83% | **B-** = 82% - 80% | **C+** = 79% - 77%  
**C** = 76% - 73% | **C-** = 72% - 70% | **F** = 69% and below

**Essays:**

You will turn in two essays, each comprising of 3-5 pages. In those essays, you will focus on a travelogue of your choice— it may even be a text/film we didn't engage in class— and form an argumentative idea about it. I will clearly explain what I mean by argumentative. These essays are designed to give you the opportunity to think critically about travel writing and present your thoughts in an analytical fashion. *#analysis-is-underrated-and-stuff*

**Presentations:**

You will do two mini presentations in class each no more than 6 minutes. They can be on the same topic as your essay in which case it is an opportunity to present your ideas and receive feedback from your peers.

**Technology in Class:**

It is fine to use your laptops in class for note taking and for referencing class readings. Surfing the web, checking emails, checking Facebook, online shopping (particularly at Amazon) are prohibited. Such activity is disruptive to the individual, the instructor, and to the remainder of the class. If I do find a student using a laptop for any purpose other than note taking, the privilege of using the laptop in class will be revoked (and I call dibs on any purchased goods!). Please turn off your cellphones before coming to class; the use of cellphones is prohibited for any reason. If it is an emergency, please let me know in advance and you will be fine.

**Disability Resources for Students:**

If you need any type of accommodation, please contact the [Office of Disability Resources for Students](#). I am more than happy to work with Disability Resources to provide appropriate accommodation for you.

**Self-Care:**

There is no learning without self-care. It is important to care for our body, mind, and spirit while we are in school. Toward that end, there are many different kinds of support services on campus,

including the Counseling Center, Hall Health, and the IMA. If you are concerned about yourself or a friend who is struggling, Safecampus, at 1-800-685-7233, is a very helpful resources to learn more about how to access campus-based support services. Also, if you ever need someone to talk to, I always make myself available to students as best I can. Please feel free to email me or come by my office.

### **Religious Accommodation:**

It is the policy of the University of Washington to accommodate student absences to allow students to take holidays for reasons of faith or conscience or for organized activities conducted under the auspices of a religious denomination, church, or religious organization, so that students' grades are not adversely impacted by the absences. Click [here](#) to read further.

### **Academic Honesty:**

Students are expected to treat their fellow classmates and instructors with honesty and respect throughout the course. All exam answers and posters must reflect original work. No form of cheating is acceptable. The following [link](#) has information on academic honesty, plagiarism, and consequences.

Students are expected to adhere to the University of Washington Code of Student Conduct which can be found at the following [link](#).

### **Civility for All:**

I am committed to creating a space that is inclusive to all. By all, I mean whoever may be reading this. The University of Washington is committed to fostering an environment where the free exchange of ideas is an integral part of the academic learning environment. Disruption of classroom discussions can prohibit other students from fully engaging and participating. Any student causing disruption may be asked to leave any class session, and, depending on the severity and frequency of that behavior, an incident report may be filled with Community Standards and Student Conduct. As a condition of enrollment, all students assume responsibility to observe standards of conduct that will contribute to the pursuit of academic goals and to the welfare of the academic community. For more detailed information on these standards, please visit [here](#).

### **Make-Up Policies:**

I am quite flexible as long as you communicate with me in advance.

## Schedule

(tentative like everything else in life)

Week	Date	Theme	Reading	Century	What's due
1	March 31, 2020  April 2, 2020	<b>Looking Back: How to View the World through Travelogues</b>	Primary - Kwame, "There Is No Such Thing as Western Civilization" - Mohsin Hamid	21st century	
2	April 7  April 9	<b>More Than a Travelogue: In Search of Wisdom</b>	Primary - Selection from Nasir Khusraw's <i>Book of Travels</i>  - Selection from Nasir Khusraw's <i>Book of Travels</i>	11th century	- Vocabulary of Travel: A Glossary
3	April 14  April 16	<b><i>Wonders of Cities and the Marvels of Traveling</i></b>	Primary - Selection from the Travels of Ibn Battuta  - Selection from the Travels of Ibn Battuta	14th century	
4	April 21  April 23	<b>Traveling Empires</b>	Primary - Selection from Ma Huan's <i>Survey of the Ocean's Shores</i>  - Selection from Ma Huan's <i>Survey of the Ocean's Shores</i>	15th century	
5	April 28  April 30	<b>Writing the Empire</b>	Primary - Selection from <i>Baburnama</i>  - Selection from <i>Baburnama</i>	16th century	- First essay due

6	May 5	<b>Which Way Home? Narratives of Pilgrimage</b>	Primary	19th century	
	May 7		- Nawab Sikandar Begum, <i>A Princess's Pilgrimage</i>		
7	May 12	<b>Does Modernity Have a Birthplace?</b>	Secondary:	Text written in 21st century, on <b>19th century</b> travellers	
	May 14		- Selection from <i>The Love of Strangers</i> - Selection from <i>The Love of Strangers</i>		
8	May 19	<b>An American in the Holy Land</b>	Primary	19th century	- Presentations due
	May 21		- Selection from <i>Innocents Abroad</i> - Selection from <i>Innocents Abroad</i>		
9	May 26	<b>An Ethnography of the "East"</b>	Primary	19th century	- Presentations due
	May 28		- Selection from Gertrude Bell's <i>Persian Pictures</i> - Selection from Freya Stark's <i>Baghdad Sketches</i>		
10	June 2	<b>In the Shadow of the Nation State</b>	Primary	20th century	
	June 4		- Selection from Halide Edib's <i>Inside India</i> - Selection from Paul Theroux's <i>The Great Railway Bazaar</i>		
Final essay due on June 11, 2020 at noon.					