

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Syllabus

Modern Iran: From the Rise of the Safavids to the Islamic Republic - 38011

Last update 26-03-2025

HU Credits: 2

Degree/Cycle: 1st degree (Bachelor)

Responsible Department: Islamic & Middle East Stud.

Academic year: 0

Semester: 2nd Semester

Teaching Languages: Hebrew

Campus: Mt. Scopus

Course/Module Coordinator: Dr D Gershon Lewental

Coordinator Email: dg.lewental@mail.huji.ac.il

Coordinator Office Hours: Wednesdays by appointment

Teaching Staff:

Dr. D Gershon Lewental

Course/Module description:

Since Antiquity, Iran has shaped the politics, culture, and ideas of the Middle East, influencing the course of events, as well as religious and social trends, and continuing to play a central rôle in both regional and global affairs today. This course explores the dynamic history of Iran from the rise of the Şafavid Empire, which established Shī'ī Islam as the state religion and laid the foundations for contemporary Iran, through the turbulent Eighteenth Century marked by political chaos and religious consolidation, to the socio-political transformations, military and financial crises, and constitutional reforms of Qājār era. We will then chart the rise and fall of the Pahlavī dynasty in the Twentieth Century and examine the revolutionary fervour that produced the Islamic Republic. We will conclude by comparing theory and reality of the ideological underpinnings of the contemporary Iranian régime and evaluating its complex internal challenges, foreign policies, and future prospects.

Course/Module aims:

This course will offer students a survey of the history of Iran since the Sixteenth Century against the broader background of historical developments in the Middle East. We will pay close attention to socio-cultural trends, particularly the tension between religion and state, as well as the status of minority communities and the position of women. Students will gain a strong understanding of the roots of contemporary Iran, the causes and consequences of the Iranian Revolution, and the domestic and foreign policies of the Islamic Republic.

Learning outcomes - On successful completion of this module, students should be able to:

At the end of this course, students will have gained a better understanding of Iran, its history, and its society, as part of the broader Middle East, while honing critical thinking and reading skills.

Attendance requirements(%):

90 (students allowed two unexcused absences over the course of the semester)

Teaching arrangement and method of instruction: reading in advance of the lessons

active participation
class discussions

short quizzes
take-home final exam

Course/Module Content:

1. Introduction to pre-modern Iran
2. Turkmen dynasties and the origins of the Ṣafavids
3. Shāh Esmā'īl and the establishment of Shī'ī Iran
4. The Apogee of Ṣafavid power under Shāh 'Abbās
5. Interregnum and chaos in Eighteenth-Century Iran
6. Changes in state and society under Qājār rule
7. From the Tobacco Protest to the Constitutional Revolution
8. The Rise of Reżā Khān and the Pahlavī dynasty
9. Mid-Twentieth Century crises in Pahlavī rule
10. Pahlavī autocracy and the road to revolution
11. Velāyat-e faqīh: From idea to revolution to state
12. The Islamic Republic after the death of Khomeynī
13. Whither the Islamic Republic?

Required Reading:

see the full syllabus on Moodle

Additional Reading Material:

Grading Scheme:

Written / Oral / Practical Exam 50 %
Active Participation / Team Assignment 20 %
Submission assignments during the semester: Exercises / Essays / Audits / Reports
/ Forum / Simulation / others 20 %
Attendance / Participation in Field Excursion 10 %

Additional information: