

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Syllabus

Rome in Africa: Italian Orientalism and Colonialism - 45353

Last update 08-03-2025

HU Credits: 2

Degree/Cycle: 1st degree (Bachelor)

Responsible Department: Romance Studies

Academic year: 0

Semester: 2nd Semester

Teaching Languages: Hebrew

Campus: Mt. Scopus

Course/Module Coordinator: Manuela Consonni

Coordinator Email: manuela.consonni@mail.huji.ac.il

Coordinator Office Hours: by appointment

Teaching Staff:

Prof. Manuela Consonni,
Mr. Fadi Asla

Course/Module description:

This course explores Italy's colonial and post-colonial engagements with Africa following its unification in 1861. From early ambitions in the Red Sea to the occupation of Libya and Ethiopia under Mussolini, we examine how Italy invoked the legacy of ancient Rome to justify imperial expansion. The course investigates colonial violence, indigenous resistance, fascist propaganda, race policies, and the memory of empire in contemporary Italy. Beyond Africa, we also explore Italy's historical presence in Palestine and the broader Holy Land, analysing the role of medical, religious, and cultural institutions—including hospitals, missionary schools, and the Dante Alighieri Society—in shaping local dynamics. Through a variety of sources, including historical accounts, novels, films, and primary documents, we assess the lasting impact of Italian colonialism on African societies, its influence on migration and political discourse, and its intersections with European involvement in Palestine. Key case studies include Italy's role in Eritrea, Somalia, Libya, and Ethiopia, as well as its connections to Palestine and the broader decolonization process. Within the frame of our discussion, we will explore the counter-narrative provided by another type of colonialism, so to speak, the one that look at emigration by showing how Italy actively managed its emigrant communities as an extension of the nation. It offers a transnational perspective on Italian history and highlights how migration shaped Italy's modernization and global presence.

Course/Module aims:

To identify and describe the forms and modes of conversations among historians within the defined historiographical fields under discussion.

To learn how to apply historical methods for the critical evaluation of past records and understand how historians and others have interpreted them.

To acquire historical research skills and tools, including the use of libraries, archives, and databases.

To develop the ability to organize and articulate arguments and thoughts, both in writing and orally.

To master the knowledge and skills involved in historical practice.

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

To master a broad corpus of sources and research while gradually acquiring and developing an analytical toolkit for understanding the relationship between a given historical phenomenon and theoretical issues related to historiographical, cultural, social, and political questions.

To critically read an article, chapter, or historiographical debate between different perspectives.

To understand the central arguments of research and recognize the scholarly approaches of different authors, with an emphasis on various types of historical writing.

To develop critical thinking skills and assess reading materials.

To formulate an original argument based on the reading materials and articulate it properly in academic writing.

To cultivate awareness and sensitivity to key methodological questions essential to constructing historical research.

Attendance requirements(%):

100

Teaching arrangement and method of instruction: frontal class seminar

Course/Module Content:

Weeks 1-2-3:

Introduction – Italy's Colonial Aspirations and the Legacy of Rome

- *Why did Italy pursue empire after 1861?*
- *The influence of Roman imperial nostalgia on nationalist ideology*
- *Justifying colonization through Roman history*
- *Reading:*

o Samuel Agbam, Restorations of empire in Africa : Ancient Rome and Modern Italy's African Colonies, Oxford : Oxford University Press; 2024: Chapters: 1 - The Fall of Italia Risorta: Ethiopia, Roman Africa, and the Invention of Italy; Chapter 2 - 'There, Too, Is Rome': The Roman Empire and the Conquest of Libya; Chapter 5 - Redeeming Italia Irredenta: Fascism's March on Africa; Chapter 6 - Italia tandem

imperium habet suum: Fascist Italy's Roman Empire.

o Mark I. Choate, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press; 2008 (Selections on expansionism): Introduction – The Program of Emigrant Colonialism; Chapter 1 – From Africa to Americas; Chapter 2 – The Great Ethnographic Empire; Chapter 4 – The Language of Dante; Chapter 5 – For Religion and for the Fatherland.

o H. R. Tate, "The Italian Colonial Empire", *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 40, No. 159 (Apr., 1941), pp. 146-158

o David Atkinson, "Constructing Italian Africa: Geography and Geopolitics," *Italian Colonialism*, Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller, eds., New York: Palgrave 2005, pp. 15-26

Week 4: The Scramble for Africa – Italy in Eritrea and Somalia

- Early Italian colonial ventures in the Red Sea
- The establishment of Italian Eritrea (1890) and Italian Somaliland (1905)
- Reading:

o Tekeste Negash, *Italian Colonialism in Eritrea, 1882-1941. Policies Praxis and Impact*, Chapter 1 - Introduction; Chapter 2 - The Political Economy of Colonialism

o Ruth Ben-Ghiat, "Modernity is just over there. Colonialism and Italian National Identity," *Interventions* Vol. 8 (3) 380-393, 2006.

- Film *Scipione l'africano* (1937 Carmine Gallone)

Weeks 5, 6, 7: The Italo-Turkish War and the Invasion of Libya (1911-1912)

- The war against the Ottoman Empire
- Reading:

o Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, *The Making of Modern Libya : state formation, colonization, and resistance, 1830-1932*, Albany : State University of New York Press; c1994: Chapter 5 – Reaction to Colonialism: the Politics o Collaboration and Resistance, 1911-1931.

o Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, *Genocide in Libya: Shar, a Hidden Colonial History*, Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY : Routledge; 2021: Chapter 2 – Eurocentrism, Silence, and Memory of Genocide; Chapter 3 - "We died because of Shar, Evil my Son.

o Oyenyi, Bukola A , *The History of Libya*, New York: Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2019: Chapter 3 – The Italian Colonial Conquest; Chapter 4 – Ccolonial Rule, Anti-colonial struggle and WW II, 1912-1950

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- *Film: The Lion of the Desert (1981, Moustapha Akkad on Omar Mukhtar's resistance)*

Week 8-9: The Ethiopian War (1935–1936) and Italian Atrocities

- *Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia and the League of Nations' response*
- *War crimes: mustard gas and massacres*
- *Reading:*
 - o *Angelo Del Boca, The Ethiopian War 1935–1941, Chicago : University of Chicago Press; 1969*
 - o *Alberto Sbacchi, Ethiopia under Mussolini : fascism and the colonial experience; London : Zed; 1985*
 - o *Ian Campbell, The Addis Ababa Massacre: Italy's National Shame, New York, NY : Oxford University Press, 2019 (Selections)*
- *Film: If Only I Were That Warrior (2015, documentary on Italian war crimes)*

Week 10: Italian Orientalism in Ottoman Palestine

- *Travelers, Merchants and Politicians – 1840-1940*
- *Italian Institutions in Palestine: From the Franciscan to the Terra Santa: Printing Presses, Hospitals, Banks, and Schools*
 - o *Mazza, Roberto, Maria Chiara Rioli, and Stéphane Ancel, "The Italian Consulate in Jerusalem: The History of a Forgotten Diplomatic Mission, 1846–1940," Jerusalem Quarterly 71 (2017): 94–107.*
 - o *Mazza, Roberto. "A Coherent Inconsistency: Italian Cultural Diplomacy in Palestine, 1918–1938." In European Cultural Diplomacy and Arab Christians in Palestine, 1918–1948, edited by Karène Sanchez Summerer and Sary Zananiri, 361–380.*

Week 11: Italy's Cultural Influence

- *The Visits of Henry Rocca and Issa Al-Nayouiri*
 - o *Archival Materials*

Week 12: Milestones in the Relations Between Italy and Palestine

- *World War I The Arab Revolt (1936-1939), World War II, and the 1948 War*
 - o *Frank E. Manuel, "The Palestine Question in Italian Diplomacy, 1917–1920," The Journal of Modern History 22, no. 3 (1950): 220–233.*
 - o *Nir Arielli, "Italian Involvement in the Arab Revolt in Palestine, 1936–1939," British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies 35, no. 2 (August 2008): 187–204.*
 - o *Manuela Williams, "Mussolini's War of Words: Italian Propaganda and Subversion in Egypt and Palestine, 1934-1939," Eunomia. Rivista semestrale del Corso di*

Laurea in Scienze Politiche e delle Relazioni Internazionali 1, no. 2 (2012): 49–78
o Nir Arielli, “Haifa is still Burning’: Italian, German and French Air Raids on Palestine during the Second World War,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 46, no. 3 (2010): 331–347.

Week 13: Italy in Palestinian Newspapers Between 1908-1948

- From Omar Il-Khayyam to World War II – Trends and Positions
- o Archival Materials

Week 14: Migration, Racism, and Italy’s “New Colonialism”

- African migration to Italy and postcolonial racism
- Nostalgia for empire in contemporary Italian politics
- Reading:
 - o Igiaba Scego, *My Home is Where I Am* (Memoir)
 - o Valeria Deplano, *Postcolonial Italy: The Impact of Colonialism on Today’s Italy*
 - Film: *Io Capitano* (2023, migration and colonial legacies)

Required Reading:

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 - *Film Scipione l'africano (1937 Carmine Gallone)*

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- *Film: Io Capitano (2023, migration and colonial legacies)*

Additional Reading Material:

Grading Scheme:

Home Exam % 40

Essay / Project / Final Assignment / Home Exam / Referat 40 %

Active Participation / Team Assignment 10 %

Attendance / Participation in Field Excursion 10 %

Additional information:
