

“Cultures and Religions of the Middle East”



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Johnnie Hicks, Instructor

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"Cultures and Religions of the Middle East"

OLLI Class F653 – Fall 2013

Session #1 – September 18

- *Welcome! Course overview; resources; structure for class sessions*
- *People, Places, Politics. and Perceptions in the "Middle East"*
 - *Identity of People across the region ... ethnicities, cultures, languages, religions*
 - *Importance of Place ... and "Sacred Geography"*
 - *Players of Politics and Power ... "state" and "non-state"*
 - *"Perceptions Are Everything!"*

Session #2 – September 25

- *Origins and basic concepts of Middle Eastern/Western religions*
 - *Zoroastrianism ... monotheism in the early Persian Empire*
 - *Children of Abraham ... Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*
 - *The Baha'i Faith ... youngest of the world's Western religions*
- *Understanding Islam (Part I)*
 - *Life of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)*
 - *Basic concepts and beliefs ... branches of Islamic traditions*

Session #3 – October 2

- *Understanding Islam (Part II)*
- *Understanding Arabs and "The Arab World"*
 - *Importance of bloodline, place, and religion*
 - *Cultural values and traditions among Arabs*
- *Who's Who in the "The Arab World?"*
- *The "Arab Awakenings" ... writing new chapters in Arab histories*

Session #4 – October 9

- *Turks in the Middle East*
 - *Turkish migrations and rule in the Middle East*
 - *The 600-year rule of the Ottoman Turkish Empire*
- *Carving out countries of the modern "Middle East"*
- *Creation of the modern Republic of Turkey*
 - *Turkish cultures, religions, and evolving politics*
 - *Turkey as a "model" for the "Arab Awakenings"?*

Session #5 – October 16

- *Understanding Iraq ... “country with deep roots”*
 - *“In the beginning ...” Biblical and historical origins*
 - *Who are the Iraqi’s? ... ethnicities, religions, languages, and politics*
 - *Iraq’s unruly last century*
- *Impact of the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq ... wins, losses, and prospects for the future*

Session #6 – October 23

- *The Kurds and Kurdistan ... history, homeland, and hopes*
 - *Ancient roots in the Zagros and Taurus mountains*
 - *Largest nation of people without a country*
- *Kurds in Turkey ... Kurds in Iraq ... Kurds in Iran ... Kurds in Syria ... Kurds in exile*
??? Dreams of a Kurdistan homeland ... could it become a reality ???

Session #7 – October 30

- *Who are the Persians ... from ancient Persian Empire to the Islamic Republic of Iran*
 - *A glorious past, a troubled present, and an uncertain future*
 - *‘Persian versions’ ... cultures, traditions, and all things ‘Persian!’*
 - *Who are the Iranians ... people, politics, and perceptions*
- *Iran, Israel, and the United States ... an ever-shifting triangle*
 - *Significance of the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the recent elections*
 - *“Talking to the enemy!” Would it help?*

Session #8 – November 6

- *Palestine and modern Israel ... perceptions, promises, and perils*
 - *Creation of the state of Israel in Palestine*
 - *Perceptions, politics, and the 66-year old war*
- *Who are the Palestinians?*
 - *Historical and biblical roots in Canaan*
 - *Impact of “al-Nakba!”*
- *Who are the Israelis?*
 - *The Jewish dreams of Zionism ... “Return to the Homeland!”*
 - *The allusive peace ... why so hard?*
- *Class closure ... reflections on class experiences ... interests in follow-up?*

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"Cultures and Religions of the Middle East"

OLLI Class F653 – Fall 2013

ARAB COUNTRIES OF THE MIDDLE EAST

<i>Morocco</i>	<i>Lebanon</i>	<i>Saudi Arabia</i>
<i>Algeria</i>	<i>Syria</i>	<i>Bahrain</i>
<i>Tunisia</i>	<i>Iraq</i>	<i>Qatar</i>
<i>Libya</i>	<i>Palestinian Territories</i>	<i>United Arab Emirates</i>
<i>Egypt</i>	<i>Jordan</i>	<i>Oman</i>
<i>Sudan</i>	<i>Kuwait</i>	<i>Yemen</i>

OTHER (NON- ARAB) COUNTRIES/NATIONS

Israel *Turkey* *Kurdistan* *Iran*

ETHNICITIES AND CULTURES

Arabs *Turks* *Persians* *Kurds* *Jews* *Bedouin* *Druze* *Others*

RELIGIONS

Zoroastrianism *Judaism* *Christianity* *Islam* *Baha'i Faith*

LANGUAGES

Arabic *Turkish* *Farsi* *Kurdish* *Hebrew* *Berber* *Others*

Who Are the People of the “Middle East?”

<u>Country</u>	<u>Capital</u>	<u>Religion</u>	<u>Language</u>
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“Arab” Countries

Morocco	Rabat	Sunni Islam	Arabic
Algeria	Algiers	Sunni Islam	Arabic
Tunisia	Tunis	Sunni Islam	Arabic
Libya	Tripoli	Sunni Islam	Arabic
Egypt	Cairo	Sunni Islam	Arabic
Sudan	Khartoum	Sunni Islam	Arabic
Lebanon	Beirut	Shi’a/Sunni Islam; Christianity	Arabic
Syria	Damascus	Sunni/Alawite Islam	Arabic
Iraq	Baghdad	Shi’a/Sunni Islam	Arabic
Palestinian Territories	Ramallah	Sunni Islam	Arabic
Jordan	Amman	Sunni Islam	Arabic
Kuwait	Al Kuwait	Sunni/Shi’a Islam	Arabic
Saudi Arabia	Riyadh	Wahabi Sunni Islam	Arabic
Bahrain	Al Manamah	Shi’a/Sunni Islam	Arabic
Qatar	Doha	Sunni Islam	Arabic
United Arab Emirates	Abu Dhabi	Sunni Islam	Arabic
Oman	Muscat	Ibadhi Sunni/Shi’a Islam	Arabic
Yemen	Sanaa	Sunni/Shi’a Islam	Arabic

“Non-Arab” Countries

Israel	Jerusalem (Tel Aviv)	Judaism/Sunni/Islam	Hebrew
Turkey	Ankara	Sunni Islam	Turkish
(Kurdistan Region)	Irbil	Sunni Islam	Kurdish
Iran	Teheran	Shi’ite Islam	Farsi

Note: Under current political and religious circumstances, many scholars and map makers also include Afghanistan and Pakistan as part of the “Greater Middle East.”

Understanding Cultures of the Middle East

General Background

- *The term “Middle East” is a parochial term given to the area by European writers and politicians. People of this region generally refer to themselves by family or ethnic group; religion; language/culture; and sometimes, by country.*
- *“Middle East” cultures are defined by “collectivist groups” in society rather than “individualists” as defined in the West. People are organized in hierarchical relationships with leadership generally determined by age, gender, or tradition about who leads, who follows, and where one’s place is in the structure of the hierarchy.*
- *People of this region tend to feel they are “rooted” in certain geographic regions and feel deeply drawn to particular areas, especially where family ancestors lived and are buried. Some feel they are not fully “whole” when away from these familiar mountains, rivers, deserts, or plateaus. The Arabic word for this emotionally personal place is “bayt” (“be-longing”).*
- *Family histories are often rooted in ancient origins. Ancestral stories are passed on through art forms of storytelling, poetry, music, dance, performances, etc. People generally identify themselves by wearing certain pieces of clothing or headgear, eating favorite foods, celebrating ethnic holidays and traditions, and often, participating in a particular means of livelihood (farming, sheep raising, carpet weaving, leather crafting, etc.).*
- *Along with family bloodlines, religion is a vital part of one’s identity. Almost everyone is “religious,” though intensity varies from almost secular to ultra-conservative. About 90% of people living in the “Middle East” identify with some form of Islam. Christian populations have dwindled over the last few years, though Christianity had been the majority religion in Lebanon for many years. Along with Christians, the Jews, Zoroastrians, and a few others make up the remaining 10% of religious populations.*
- *Among Muslims in the “Middle East,” about 85% practice some form of Sunni Islam; of the remaining 15%, about 12% are Shi’a Muslims or are members of newer branches of the Sunni and Shi’a traditions. Sufism comes from both Sunni and Shi’a traditions.*
- *Since Friday is the Holy Day for Muslims, the “Middle East” week begins on Saturday and ends mid-day on Thursday (some on Wednesday evening). Jews still observe the Sabbath on Saturday.*

Important Cultural Values and Worldviews

- *People in the “Middle East” generally think of themselves in terms of “We-People” (as compared to “I-People” of the West). This means that individuals tend to downplay their own personal needs and wants in order to do what is best for their group. (See attachment: Understanding ‘I-People’ vs. ‘We-People’)*
- *Bloodlines are very important and often reflected in people’s names. For example: “Fatima um Hamed” is “Fatima, mother of Hamed;” “Mohammad bin Ali” is “Mohammad, son of Ali.” Family names are the source of great pride and should always be pronounced correctly.*
- *Issues of “pride” and “avoidance of shame” are critical aspects of “Middle Eastern” cultures. One must try, at all times, to avoid being in a position of “shame,” as this will be reflected on all members of one’s family or group.*
- *Dignity, honor, generosity, and loyalty are all of paramount importance, as these values are seen to relate to the whole family. Piety is a very important trait of human character; therefore, one must behave at all times in a manner that creates a good impression on others.*
- *Most people believe in the strong workings of “fate,” meaning that human beings do not try to assume too much control over life’s events. Therefore, “Ensha-allah” (“If God wills”) is expressed when talking about anything in the future.*
- *One’s personal status of family membership is generally determined at birth and remains throughout one’s lifetime. Social status is also generally determined and will be a major factor in future arranged marriages. “Who one is” is often seen as more important than “What one does” (“Being” vs. “Doing”)*
- *Most people of the “Middle East” believe in the workings of “jinn” in their lives. They seek to attract good “jinn” and take precautions to avoid bad “jinn” (also known as “the evil eye”). It is common to see amulets such as blue beads or pieces of jewelry on children and special beads carried by men and boys. People avoid speaking of certain conditions, such as death, so as not to draw the attention of “the evil eye.”*
- *And, finally, “Middle Eastern” people hold a very high place in their lives for expressing and receiving hospitality! This cultural value is second to none. No food is too scarce, no sacrifice too high, and no effort is spared to welcome even strangers into one’s home for a lavish feast! One should never refuse an offer... nor fail to reciprocate in time. (Remember: Always use the right hand only when eating!)*

Understanding “I-People” vs. “We-People”

Generally “individualists” (“I-People”) tend to:

- View “**the individual**” as building blocks of society; values “individualism”
- Reject the idea of “**fate**” and feel they have a great deal of control over their own lives, as well as over the natural environment
- Plan for “**the future**” and securing one’s own place in the world; view “**change**” over “tradition” as desirable and inevitable
- Prefer “**independence**” and self-help rather than relying on others
- Value “**action over being**” and earning one’s own reputation and worth by “what one does”
- Value “**competition**” and free enterprise and seek personal success
- Have interests in several “**in-groups**” made up of different people such as one’s neighborhood, work or professional group, religious community, and other social/professional affiliations

Generally “collectivists” (“We-People”) tend to:

- View “**the group**” as basic units of society; self-identity comes through group identity with others such as family, tribe, ancestors, or religious group; values “hierarchical relationships”
- Hold to a worldview of “**fate**” or the “**supernatural**” having more control over their lives; sense more reverence for the natural environment
- Value traditions of “**the past**,” prefer “**tradition**” over rapid change; live more for “the present” and view “the future” with less certainty
- Prefer “**interdependence**” and sharing resources and cooperative reliance with others
- Value “**being over action**” and emphasize character building reputation by “who one is”
- Value “**cooperation**” and social harmony; seek to have collective successes
- Have fewer “**in-groups**” ... perhaps only one ... and feel more enmeshed with each other’s lives; important to remain loyal over time; tendencies to be suspicious of outsiders to one’s own group

Ideas from Harry C. Triandis: Intercultural Skills for Multicultural Societies.

Johnnie Hicks – 09/18/13

Politics and Power

- The “Middle East” has the widest range of governments than any other region of the world. There are monarchies, theocracies, democracies, sultanates, republics, and more! Many countries are undergoing changes brought about by the “Arab Spring.”

- As of today ☺ these Arab countries have agnatic (male kinship inherited) Absolute Monarchies ... or Sultanates ... or Kingdoms ... within the “Middle East:”

Saudi Arabia; Oman; Qatar; and the United Arab Emirates of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Shayah, Ajman, Fujairah, Ras al Khaiman, and Umm al-Qaiwain.

- These Arab countries have Constitutional Monarchies:

Morocco; Jordan; Kuwait; and Bahrain.

- These Arab countries have Elected (Presidential?) Governments (of some sort):

Algeria; Egypt; Iraq; Lebanon; Libya; Palestinian Territories; Sudan (a Federal Republic); Syria; Tunisia; and Yemen.

- These non-Arab countries also have Elected Presidential Governments:

Israel; Turkey; Kurdistan (in Iraq); and Iran (a Theocracy)

- In addition, other “non-state” organizations continue to hold great influences over people’s lives. These include:

- The Muslim Brotherhood - a Sunni Muslim organization founded in Egypt in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna, a 22-year old elementary school teacher. The brotherhood calls for a conservative Islamist way of life and is currently the world’s largest and most influential Sunni Islamic group. Egypt’s first elected president following the Arab Spring, Mohammad Morsi is a Muslim Brotherhood member but was recently overthrown by the Egyptian military.

- Hamas - a Sunni Muslim organization created in 1987 as a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. Hamas was formed to serve the Palestinian people in Gaza and the West Bank and consists of two arms: a social wing which builds and operates schools, clinics, hospitals, and other social programs; and a military wing that has carried out numerous attacks on Israel’s military and general population.

- Hezbollah - a Shi’ite organization founded in 1982 to serve the Shi’a Muslim populations in Lebanon following Israel’s second incursion into Lebanon. It also consists of two arms: a social wing and a military wing. Johnnie Hicks - 09/18/13

Recommended Books on the Middle East

Ahmed, Akbar (2007): Journey into Islam – The Crisis of Globalization. Brookings Institute Press; Washington, DC. Also (2010): Journey into America – The Challenge of Islam.

Ali, Ahmed (1993): Al-Qur'an – A Contemporary Translation. Princeton University Press; NJ.

Anderson, Liam & Stansfield, Gareth (2004): The Future of Iraq – Dictatorship, Democracy, or Division? Palgrave Macmillan; NY.

Anderson, Scott (2013): Lawrence in Arabia - War, Deceit, Imperial Folly, and the Making of the Modern Middle East. Doubleday; NY.

Armstrong, Karen (2000): Islam – A Short History. Random House; NY. Also (1997): Jerusalem – One City, Three Faiths. Ballantine Books; NY. Also (1992): Muhammad – A Biography of the Prophet. Harper, San Francisco. Also (2006): Muhammad – A Prophet for Our Time.

Aslan, Reza (1996): No god but God – The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam. Random House; NY. Also (2009): How to Win a Cosmic War – God, Globalization, and the End of the War on Terror. Random House; NY. Also (2013): Zealot – The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth.

Axworthy, Michael (2010): A History of Iran – Empire of the Mind. Perseus Books; NY.

Bahrampour, Tara (1999): To See and See Again. University of California Press; Berkeley. (Iran)

Bailey, Betty Jane & Bailey, J. Martin (2003): Who Are the Christians in the Middle East? William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Grand Rapids, MI.

Batmanglij, Najmieh (1992): New Food of Life – A Book of Ancient Persian and Modern Iranian Cooking and Ceremonies. Mage Publishers; Washington., DC.

Beinart, Peter (2012): The Crisis of Zionism. Henry Holt & Co.; NY.

Bowden, Mark (2006): Guests of the Ayatollah – The First Battle in America's War with Military Islam. Atlantic Monthly Press; NY. (Iran)

Boyce, Mary (2002): Zoroastrians – Their Religious Beliefs and Practices. St. Edmundsbury Press, Ltd.; Suffolk; UK.

Brend, Barbara and Melville, Charles (2010): Epic of the Persian Kings – The Art of Ferdowsi's 'Shahnameh'. The Fitzwilliam Museum; Cambridge, UK.

Cahill, Thomas (1998): The Gifts of the Jews – How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels. Doubleday; NY.

Chandrasekaran, Rajiv (2007): Imperial Life in the Emerald City – Inside Iraq's Green Zone. Alfred A. Knopf; NY.

- Cole, Juan (2009):** Engaging the Muslim World. Palgrave-Macmillan; NY.
- Cragg, Kenneth (2003):** Jesus and the Muslim. One World Publications; Boston, MA.
- Crist, David (2012):** The Twilight War – The Secret History of America’s Thirty-year Conflict with Iran. Penguin Press; NY.
- Davis, Joyce M. (2003):** Martyrs – Innocence, Vengeance, and Despair in the Middle East. Palgrave – Macmillan; NY.
- de Bellaigue, Christopher (2012):** Patriot of Persia – Muhammad Mossadegh and a Tragic Anglo-American Coup. Harper Collins; NY.
- de Lange, Nicholas (2003):** Judaism. Oxford University Press; NY.
- Diamant, Anita (1992):** The Red Tent. Pacador USA; NY. **(Historical fiction of Biblical tribes)**
- Dumas, Firoozeh (2003):** Funny in Farsi – A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian-American. Random House; NY.
- Eiland, Murray L Jr. & Eiland, Murray III (1998):** Oriental Carpets – A Complete Guide. Bulfinch Press; Boston.
- Esposito, John L. (2010):** The Future of Islam. Oxford University Press; NY. Also **(1988):** Islam – The Straight Path.
- Esslemont, J.E. (1980):** Baha’u’llah and the New Era. Baha’i Publishing Trust; Wilmette, IL.
- Farhad, Massumeh with Bagci, Serpil (2010):** Falnama – The Book of Omens. Smithsonian Institution; Washington, DC.
- Farmaian, Sattareh Farman (1992):** Daughter of Persia – A Woman’s Journey from Her Father’s Harem Through the Islamic Revolution. Crown Publishers; NY.
- Feiler, Bruce (2002):** Abraham – A Journey to the Heart of Three Faiths. William Morrow – Harper Collins; NY. Also **(2005):** Where God Was Born. Harper Collins; NY.
- Fernea, Elizabeth W. (1965):** Guests of the Sheik. Anchor Books – Doubleday; NY. **(Iraq)**
- Findley, Carter V. (2005):** The Turks in World History. Oxford University Press; UK.
- Finkel, Caroline (2005):** Osman’s Dream – The Story of the Ottoman Empire 1300 – 1923. John Murray Publishers; London, UK.
- Fromkin, David (1989):** A Peace to End All Peace – The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East. Henry Holt & Co.; NY. **(Also 2009 update edition)**
- Galbraith, Peter W. (2006):** The End of Iraq – How American Incompetence Created a War Without End. Simon & Schuster; NY.

- Green, Joey (2005):** Jesus and Muhammad – The Parallel Sayings. Seastone; Berkeley, CA.
- Gregg, Gary S (2005):** The Middle East – A Cultural Psychology. Oxford University Press; NY.
- Hiro, Dilip (2005):** The Iranian Labyrinth – Journeys Through Theocratic Iran and Its Furies. Nation Books – Avalon Publishing Group; NY.
- Howell, Georgina (2006):** Gertrude Bell – Queen of the Desert, Shaper of Nations. Farrar, Straus & Giroux; NY. (Iraq)
- Ibrahim, Lamees (2011):** The Iraqi Cookbook. Interlink Publishing Group; Northampton, MA.
- Iskandar, Marwan (2006):** Rafiq Hariri and the Fate of Lebanon. SAQI Books; Berkeley, CA.
- Karabell, Zachary (2007):** Peace Be Upon You – The Story of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish Coexistence. Alfred A. Knopf; NY.
- Keddie, Nikki (2007):** Women in the Middle East – Past and Present. Princeton University Press; NJ.
- Kennedy, Hugh (2004):** When Baghdad Ruled the Muslim World. Perseus Books; Cambridge, MA.
- Khalidi, Rashid (2009):** Sowing Crisis – The Cold War and American Dominance in the Middle East. Beacon Press; Boston. Also (2007): The Iron Cage – The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood.
- King Abdullah II of Jordan (2011):** Our Last Best Chance – The Pursuit of Peace in a Time of Peril. Viking Press; NY.
- Kinzer, Stephen (2010):** Reset – Iran, Turkey, and America’s Future. Times Books – Henry Holt & Co.; NY. Also (2008): Turkey Between Two Worlds. Farrar, Straus, & Giroux; NY. Also (2003): All the Shah’s Men – An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror. John Wiley & Sons; NY.
- Korda, Michael (2010):** Hero – The Life and Legend of Lawrence of Arabia. Harper Collins; NY.
- Kriwaczek, Paul (2002):** In Search of Zarathustra – Across Iran and Central Asia to Find the World’s First Prophet. Vintage Books; NY.
- Lamb, David (2002):** The Arabs – Journey Beyond the Mirage. Vintage Books; NY.
- Lawrence, Quil (2008):** Invisible Nation – How the Kurds’ Quest for Statehood Is Shaping Iraq and the Middle East. Walker and Co.; NY.
- Lewis, Bernard (2010):** Faith and Power – Religion and Politics in the Middle East. Oxford University Press; UK. Also (1998): Multiple Identities of the Middle East. Random House; NY.
- Leverett, Flynt (2005):** Inheriting Syria – Bashar’s Trial by Fire. Brookings; Washington, DC.
- Lord Kinross (1977):** The Ottoman Centuries – The Rise and Fall of the Turkish Empire. William Morrow & Co.; NY.

- MacKey, Sandra (1998):** *The Iranians – Persia, Islam, and the Soul of a Nation*. Penguin Group – Plume; NY. Also (2002): *The Saudis – Inside the Desert Kingdom*. W.W. Norton & Co.; NY.
- Mango, Andrew (2004):** *The Turks Today*. The Overlook Press; NY.
- Marr, Phebe (2004):** *The Modern History of Iraq*. Perseus Books; Boulder, CO.
- McDowall, David (1996):** *A Modern History of the Kurds*. I.B. Tauris; London & NY.
- McKiernan, Kevin (2006):** *The Kurds – A People in Search of Their Homeland*. St. Martin's Press; NY.
- Merselas, Susan (2004):** *Kurdistan – In the Shadow of History*. University of Chicago Press; IL.
- Milani, Abbas (2011):** *The Shah*. Palgrave Macmillan; NY.
- Miller, Aaron David (2008):** *The Much Too Promised Land*. Random House; NY.
- Munier, Gilles (2004):** *Iraq – An Illustrated History and Guide*. Interlink Publishing Group; Northampton, MA.
- Nasr, Vali (2007):** *The Shi'a Revival – How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*. W.W. Norton & Co.; NY. Also (2009): *Forces of Fortune – The Rise of the New Muslim Middle Class and What It Will Mean for Our World*. Simon and Schuster; NY.
- National Geographic Society (2008):** *Atlas of the Middle East*. Washington, DC.
- Nomani, Asma Q. (2006):** *Alone – An American Woman's Struggle for the Soul of Islam*. Harper; San Francisco.
- Nydell, Margaret K. (2006):** *Understanding Arabs – A Guide for Westerners*. Intercultural Press; Yarmouth, ME.
- O'Hanlon, Michael; and Riedel, Bruce (2009):** *Which Path to Persia? – Options for a New American Strategy Toward Iran*. Brookings Institution Press; Washington, DC.
- Packer, George (2005):** *The Assassin's Gate – America in Iraq*. Tarrar, Straus, and Giroux; NY.
- Pahlavi, Farah (2004):** *An Enduring Love – My Life with the Shah*. Miramax Books; NY.
- Parry, Ken (ed.) (2010):** *The Blackwell Companion to Eastern Christianity*. Blackwell Publishing, Ltd.; UK.
- Parsi, Trita (2007):** *Treacherous Alliance – The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States*. Yale University; New Haven, CT. Also (2012): *A Single Roll of the Dice – Obama's Diplomacy in Iran*.
- Peters, F.E. (2006):** *Children of Abraham- Judaism, Christianity, Islam*. Princeton University Press; NJ.
- Phipps, William E. (1996):** *Muhammad and Jesus – A Comparison of the Prophets and Their Teachings*. Continuum; NY.

- Pollack, Kenneth M. (2004):** The Persian Puzzle – The Conflict Between Iran and America. Random House; NY. Also **Pollack, Kenneth; Byman, Daniel L.; Indyk, Martin; Maloney, Suzanne;**
- Prunhuber, Carol (2009):** The Passion and Death of Rahman the Kurd – Dreaming Kurdistan. Universe, Inc.; NY.
- Queen Noor (2003):** Leap of Faith – Memoirs of an Unexpected Life. Miramax Books; NY. **(Jordan)**
- Ramazani, Nesta (2002):** The Dance of the Rose and the Nightengale. Syracuse University Press; New Haven, CT. **(Iran)** Also **(2000):** Persian Cooking – A Table of Exotic Delights.
- Ricks, Thomas E. (2006):** Fiasco – The American Military Adventure in Iraq. Penguin Press; NY. Also **(2009)** The Gamble – General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq 2006-2008.
- Rogan, Eugene (2009):** The Arabs – A History. Perseus Books; NY.
- Rubin, Barry (2008):** The Truth About Syria. Palgrave Macmillan; NY.
- Satrapi, Marjane (2004):** Persepolis – The Story of a Childhood (Vol. 1) and The Story of a Return (Vol. 2). Pantheon; NY. **(Graphic non-fiction) (Iran)**
- Sciolino, Elaine (2000):** Persian Mirrors – The Elusive Face of Iran. Simon & Schuster; NY.
- Sedat, Jehan (2009):** My Hope for Peace. Free Press – Simon & Schuster; NY. **(Egypt)**
- Shadid, Anthony (2012):** House of Stone – A Memoir of Home, Family, and a Lost Middle East. Houghton Mifflin; NY. **(Lebanon)** Also **(2005):** Night Draws Near – Iraq's People in the Shadow of America's War. Henry Holt & Co.; NY.
- Shipler, David K. (2002):** Arab and Jew – Wounded Spirits in a Promised Land. Penguin Books; NY.
- Smith, Huston (1991):** The World's Religions. Harper; San Francisco, CA.
- Smith, Peter (1987):** The Babi & Baha'i Religions – From Messianic Shi'ism to a World Religion. Cambridge University Press; London, UK.
- Stone, Peter F. (2004):** Tribal & Village Rugs – The Definitive Guide to Design, Pattern, & Motif. Thames & Hudson; NY.
- Takeyh, Ray (2009):** Guardians of the Revolution – Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs. Oxford University Press; NY.
- Tripp, Charles (2002):** A History of Iraq. Cambridge University Press. UK.
- Wright, Robin (2011):** Rock the Casbah – Rage and Rebellion Across the Islamic World. Simon & Schuster; NY. Also **(2008):** Dreams and Shadows – The Future of the Middle East. Penguin Press; NY.

Recommended Films and Documentaries

The Axis of Evil – A Middle Eastern comedy group

Budrus - Palestinians and the separation barrier

Caramel – Women in modern Lebanon

Children of Heaven – Iranian family with little means

Color of Paradise – Iranian blind child in rural community

Control Room – Inside Al-Jazeera news network

Encounter Point – Israeli and Palestinian families

The Hajj, One American's Pilgrimage to Mecca – ABC Nightline news special

House of Sand and Fog – Iranian family in Los Angeles

The Iranian Americans – PBS Television

Inside Iran – ABC Nightline news special

Jerusalem – The City Touched by God – narrated by Liv Ullman

Journey of Hope – A Kurdish family's search for a better life

Lawrence of Arabia – British in Arab lands during early 20th century

Lemon Tree – West Bank and Israel

Monsieur Lazhar – Algerian in Montreal

Paradise Now – Palestinian young men

Persepolis – Iranian family (graphic non-fiction)

A Separation – Modern Iranian family in Teheran

The Song of Sparrows – Iranian family

The Syrian Bride – Druze in Golan Heights

Three Faiths, One God – Judaism, Christianity, Islam

Turtles Can Fly – Kurdish children in Iraq

Waltz with Bashir – 1982 Lebanese War

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