

**History 273:
Water, Conflict and Connection in the Middle East**

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Water has played many pivotal roles in the societies and politics of Middle Eastern peoples. It has sustained life, encouraged trade, supported agriculture, provided a reason for war, offered sites for fishing and pearl-harvesting, stimulated technological innovation, and hosted disease. It is no wonder, then, that water serves as a major element in the religion of all three monotheisms that arose in the region.

This semester, History 273 is a CURE course. That means that the research we undertake about water in the Middle East will be yours. You will be asking the questions, you will be identifying the sources, you will be analyzing the evidence, and you will be producing a result to share with broader communities. You will work together throughout the course, experiencing the euphoria and the frustration historians encounter during research: trying to make sense of information that doesn't fit together, stumbling from source to source to get the answers to your questions, trying to figure out how to bring dissonant information together make an historical argument that is coherent and significant. At the end of the semester, we will share our findings online with GIS Time Sliders.

During Fall 2019, our big problem will be to discover the varied impacts of dams on the landscape of the Middle East and the lives of its people. Dams are among the ways that humans have tried to intervene in an arid landscape to redirect precious water resources. Dams have spread cultivation, destroyed societies, spread diseases, altered agriculture, and led to threats of violence. Dams illustrate some of the biggest issues relating to water in the region. Their effects have been enormous. For example:

- Saddam Hussein's damming the Euphrates destroyed the millenia-old livelihoods of the Marsh Arabs
- Mosul Dam was constructed on porous soil, and years of war have turned it into a threat to the survival of the cities along the Tigris River
- the Aswan Dam created ideal conditions for the spread of schistosomiasis
- the Ilusu Dam in eastern Turkey is flooding Kurdish villages, erasing all traces of their cultural heritage;
- the new Greater Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) has brought threats of war from the government in Cairo.

You will be responsible for choosing one of the dams that has been important in the region and analyzing the most significant effects of those dams.

COURSE PROJECT

Student groups will choose one dam at the beginning of the semester, and research a series of questions:

1. What was the area like before the dam was built?
2. How did the agency building the dam explain the need for it?
3. What additional elements do you think led to the creation and siting of the dam?
4. What were the consequences of the building of this dam for the landscape, for agriculture, for public health, for the lives and livelihoods of the population?
5. What kinds of changes were different than anticipated?
6. How could the negative effects of the dam have been avoided? (Some possibilities might be different placement, different construction, better anticipation of health outcomes.)

Some of these questions can be addressed with traditional historical sources and attention to broader historical and geographical contexts. To understand the consequences, we will also be relying on a [GIS time slider](#). The terrific staff at Davis has created four labs for us to learn GIS (Geographic Information System). During the first week, we will be introduced to GIS. For the next four Thursdays, we will work on the labs to learn the basics we'll need to use this mapping program. On Tuesdays, we will talk about the Middle East and water issues.

In this research-exposure course, you will be working with a Graduate Research Consultant, Madelaine Azar (mcazar@live.unc.edu), who will assist you with your research projects. The GRC Program is sponsored by the Office for Undergraduate Research (www.unc.edu/depts/our), and you may be able to use this research-exposure course to meet a requirement of the Carolina Research Scholars Program (<http://our.unc.edu/students/crsp/>). I encourage you to visit the [OUR website](#) to learn about how you might engage in research, scholarship and creative performance while you are at Carolina.

Goals:

- Thinking like a historian: This course focuses on encouraging critical analysis of sources and thinking about the multiple causes of events in the past. Historians emphasize that facts are essential but not sufficient, that it is necessary to bring a critical eye to sources, that events cannot be understood independent of their context, and that they make sense only when they can be marshaled into evidence to support coherent interpretations of the past. Historians must learn to differentiate between "opinion" and "interpretation," and historical methodology can provide the background necessary to both create and analyze arguments based on evidence.
- Recognizing the importance of the past: By connecting water issues in the past with continuing water challenges in the present, students can understand how current problems have origins in previous times, and that this history is essential to understanding and formulating policy for the future. I hope that this course will help you connect history with policy and offer you a chance to hone your intellectual understanding and your commitments to active participation in a global society.

- Recognizing the nature of research in history: This is a CURE course. In addition to providing information about a topic and a discipline, these courses focus on the nature of research.

<p>Use of evidence-based practices. Asking questions, building and evaluating models, proposing hypotheses, designing studies, selecting methods, using the tools of inquiry/investigation, gathering and analyzing data, identifying meaningful variation, navigating the messiness of real-world data, developing and critiquing interpretations and arguments, and communicating findings.</p>	<p>Discovery/Novel. The outcome of an investigation is unknown to both the students and the instructor. Students must make decisions such as how to interpret their data, when to track down an anomaly and when to ignore it as "noise," or when results are sufficiently convincing to draw conclusions. Students' findings offer some new insight into how the world works.</p>
<p>Broadly relevant. CUREs provide opportunities for students to build on and contribute to current knowledge, they also present opportunities for impact and action beyond the classroom. In some CUREs, this may manifest as authorship or acknowledgment in a research publication or students may develop reports/recommendations of interest to the local community,</p>	<p>Iteration. Students may design, conduct, and interpret an investigation and, based on their results, repeat or revise aspects of their work to address problems or inconsistencies, rule out alternative explanations, or gather additional data to support assertions. Students may also build on and revise aspects of other students' investigations, whether within a single course to accumulate a sufficiently large data set for analysis or across successive offerings of the course to measure and manage variation, further test preliminary hypotheses, or increase confidence in previous findings. Students learn by trying, failing, and trying again, and by critiquing one another's work, especially the extent to which claims can be supported by evidence</p>
<p>Collaboration. Through collaboration, students can improve their work in response to peer feedback. Collaboration also develops important intellectual and communication skills as students verbalize their thinking and practice communicating ideas and interpretations either to fellow students in the same discipline or to students in other disciplines.</p>	



Adapted by K.Hogan from: [CBE Life Sci Educ.](#), 2014 Spring;13(1):29-40

Other Expectations

Participation: I expect you to attend all class sessions and participate actively in discussions and labs. Participation is a large part of your grade. When assigning a score, I will ask these questions: Did it make a difference to the class that you were a member? Did you add something? Did you accept your share of responsibility for the success of this class? Were you merely an observer of everyone else's endeavors? If you are uncomfortable speaking in class, please come to talk with me.

Peer Writing and Responses: You will write weekly in this class. This is because, first, we clarify what we know and how we think when we write about it; and second, I believe that everyone can write and be good at it, and that the best way to learn is practice. Finally, your weekly writing will keep you on track and let me know what information I need to offer to help you make sense of broader contexts.

I will set up sakai groups of 3-4 students. By midnight Friday, please post a 400 word reflection on the readings or on your research. At the end of each post, please ask questions. Questions are extremely important to historians: they indicate where we are in our research (your questions will change significantly as the semester continues); they suggest ways our research could focus in the future; they show us what we don't yet know. In addition, I will use your questions to craft mini-lectures if those seem necessary.

By midnight Sunday, please respond to the others in your small group. Perhaps you can offer suggestions on sources, a new perspective on the readings, or your own answers to the

questions your classmates pose. Your 150-200 word responses are not a formal evaluation of your classmates' writing; rather they must strive to become part of a **dialogue between intellectual equals**.

I hope these Reflections and Responses offer you the opportunity to create an intellectual community. Others in your group will not be those with whom you will be working on your dam project. That will let you test ideas with others who don't know the background of your research. If you are writing about readings, please DO NOT just summarize them. My goal is to make you think deeply about some challenging idea, and to be able to express your thoughts so that your classmates can follow your ideas. These responses aren't for me. Your audience will be the three or four other students in your group. This is my way of asking you to engage seriously and thoughtfully with big issues.

Grading:

Participation in class: 10%

Reflections and Responses: 15%

First presentation: 15%

First GIS presentation: 15%

Presentation to outside experts: 20%

Final Project: 25%

Presentation and project grades will be broken down into sources, analysis, and presentation.

Participation Grade: Your participation in class discussions is crucial to making this course work, and will be reflected in a participation grade that will account for 10% of the total. You will be responsible for helping to assign your own participation grade. Here are some general guidelines (with thanks to Eliot Spencer):

- If you show up on time, every time, and offer insightful comments multiple times at every session—in other words, if you are one of the people on whom I can depend at each meeting— then you will receive a participation grade in the A range. (Excellent)
- If you show up on time, every time, and speak up once or twice each meeting, you can expect a participation grade in the B range. (Good)
- If you show up on time, every time, and speak up occasionally, you can expect a C+ or C in participation. (Satisfactory)
- If you show up on time, every time, but almost never (or never) speak up, you can expect a C or D in participation. (Passing)

If you are shy or have concerns about speaking up in class, please don't hesitate to set up a meeting with me, and we can work out some strategies to help you feel more comfortable.

I will read all the **Peer Writing and Response** posts, but I will not grade them individually in the traditional manner. You will get a grade at the end of the semester for the totality of your work, according to the following guidelines:

- If you produce a sufficient quantity of prose on a weekly basis in the manner requested, it will be hard for you to get below a B–.
- If, in addition to (1) above, you are engaged, you struggle, and you deal with challenging issues, it will be hard for you to get below a B.
- If, in addition to (1) and (2) above, you demonstrate significant improvement from the beginning of the semester to its end, it will be hard for you to get below a B+.
- If, in addition to (1), (2), and (3) above, you demonstrate intellectual imagination, it will be hard for you to get below an A–.
- If you want an A, do all the above in the extreme.

Plagiarism is a serious offense in the historical profession, and is unacceptable at this university; the provisions of the honor code are applicable to this as to other courses, and students will be expected to follow them. Among other things, this means that you have to BOTH provide citations when you use the work of others, and that you have to put quotations you have taken from others within quotation marks “”. Please make sure you are familiar with the Honor System by [completing this module](#).

Schedule (subject to change)

Week 1:

August 20: Introductions: The Problem and the CURE

[Research notes in History](#)

In class film critique: Analyzing sources in “Thirsting for War”

August 22: Introduction to GIS. MEET IN DAVIS LIBRARY 247

Week 2:

Water in the Middle East: Human interpretation, Human intervention

Ian Bradley, [Water: A Spiritual History EBook](#) (Read free sample)

[A Fertile Crescent?](#)

[Richard Covington, “The Art and Science of Water”](#)

[“The Giant Norias of Hama – Magnificent Waterwheels of the Past”](#)

Choosing Dams: What are we looking for? Find information on 2 dams

August 29 Lab 1

Week 3:

September 3 Why Dams?

[Ilisu Dam](#)

[“Ethiopian Dam Project Raises Fears Of Water Deficit in Egypt”](#)

Hilal Elver, “Turkey’s Rivers of Dispute,” *Middle East Report*, no. 254 (2010): 14–18.

[The World is Experiencing an Unprecedented Boom in Dam Building](#)

[Salween River Dams Intrude on Contested Land podcast](#)

[The Great Era of California Dam Building May be Over](#)

September 5 Lab 2

Week 4:

September 10 Dams and health

Leonard B Lerer and Thayer Scudder, "Health Impacts of Large Dams," *Environmental Impact Assessment Review* 19, no. 2 (March 1999): 113–23.

Serap Aksoy, "The GAP Project in Southeastern Turkey: The Potential for Emergence of Diseases," *Emerging Infectious Diseases* 1, no. 2 (June 1995): 62–63

[Water and sanitation in a refugee camp](#)

September 12 Lab 3

Week 5:

September 16 Work with GRC on sources for dams chosen (Sign up for times)

September 18 Lab 4

Week 6:

September 24 First presentation on your dam, students assign readings, student suggestions on comparisons, contexts, sources

September 26 First presentation on your dam, students assign readings, student suggestions on comparisons, contexts, sources

Week 7:

October 1 What kind of information matters? Finding geospatial, demographic, climate, public health databases

October 3 What kind of information matters? Finding geospatial, demographic, climate, public health databases

Week 8:

October 8 First time slider presentation and student critiques

October 10 First time slider presentation and student critiques

Week 9:

October 15 First time slider presentation and student critiques

October 17 Fall Break

Week 10:

October 22 Water and the State

Abdel-Mawla Ismail, "Drinking Water Protests in Egypt and the Role of Civil Society"

Toby C. Jones, "State of Nature: The Politics of Water in the Making of Saudi Arabia"

Shahrazad Mohtadi, "Climate Change and the Syrian Uprising"

[Francesco Femia & Caitlin Werrell](#), "Syria: Climate Change, Drought and Social Unrest"

Richard Porter, "Marsh flooding brings new life to Iraq's 'Garden of Eden'"

Curtis J. Richardson and Najah A. Hussain, "Restoring the Garden of Eden: An Ecological Assessment of the Marshes of Iraq"

October 24 Revise GIS

Week 11:

October 29 Middle East contexts reading, topics and readings to be announced (see Reflections)

October 31 Revise Presentations

Week 12:

November 5 Your questions and discussion about issues

November 7 Time to be used as necessary: consultations, research, lab

Week 13:

November 12 Presentation to outside experts

November 14 Presentation to outside experts

Week 14:

November 19 Incorporating new perspectives

November 21 Incorporating new perspectives

Week 15:

November 26 Incorporating new perspectives

November 28 Thanksgiving

December 3 CELEBRATE! Expo, 3-5, Kenan Stadium

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ffsd0J0aQAw>

or

https://players.brightcove.net/53038991001/Byx2STOH0_default/index.html?videoId=5715110116001