ARCH 1810
UNDER THE TOWER OF BABEL:
ARCHAEOLOGY, POLITICS, AND IDENTITY IN THE MODERN MIDDLE EAST

Joukowsky Institute for Archaeology and the Ancient World
Brown University – Spring 2010

Meets Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:30-11:50 am Rhode Island Hall 108
Instructor: Ömür Harmansah (Omur_Harmansah@brown.edu)
Assistant Professor of Archaeology and Egyptology and Ancient Western Asian Studies
Ömür’s Office Hours: Tuesdays 1-3 pm at Joukowsky Institute Room 102.

Course Wiki: http://proteus.brown.edu/modernmiddleeast10

Course Description

Our understanding of the past is profoundly impacted by political ideologies of the present. In this course, we will explore the use and abuse of archaeological pasts among the modern nation states in the Middle East since the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. What do pharaohs mean to modern Egyptians? Who suggested that Hittites were the ancestors of Turks? Why do modern Assyrian Christians still celebrate ancient festivals? How do archaeological projects in Israel-Palestine attempt to verify Biblical texts? Why did Saddam Hussein consider himself the last Babylonian king? Discussing the constructions of secular modernity in the formation of modern nation states, we will study the integration of imagined ancient pasts and cultural heritage in the making of collective identities and state ideologies. While we explore archaeological activities that intended to satisfy such needs, we will interrogate how the pervasive force of archaeology became nationalistic obsession since the late 19th century.

The course is intended to capture a lot of the recent literature and scholarly debates on the politics of archaeological practice and cultural heritage in the Middle East. Such debates have intensified in the last two decades, particularly related to political unrests in countries like Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan, looting of the Baghdad Museum, bombing of Bamiyan Buddhas, extensive looting of archaeological sites and the recent flourishing of antiquities trade, deadly conflicts over sacred places among religious groups at sites like Ayodhya, India or Karbala, Iraq and cultural patrimony law suits such as the one over the Elamite...
Tablets on loan at the Oriental Institute (Chicago) which belongs to the Iranian government. The course however plans to bring to discussion a long-term overview of the political uses of archaeology in the Middle East from late 19th century onwards. The focus will be the establishment of archaeological practice in the late Ottoman Empire and the foundation of the Imperial archaeological museum, the role of archaeology in the formation of the modern nation states of Turkey, Iraq, Egypt, and Israel.

Books ordered at the Brown Bookstore


Course Requirements and Practicalities

Students are expected to do the weekly readings thoroughly, to participate in the discussion sessions, and to ask relevant questions following the lectures. Every Tuesday, there will be a 1 hour lecture on the weekly theme, followed by questions and discussion. Every Thursday the entire class will be dedicated to seminar discussion on the weekly readings.

The chorus: Starting in Week 3, I will ask 5-6 students to volunteer to act as the chorus for the Thursday discussions. The chorus will constitute the inner circle of discussants responsible to do the weekly readings more carefully than others and be prepared to be very active during that week's discussion. Students who are outside this circle are also invited to intervene to the discussion and contribute but they are expected to respect the dominating role of the chorus. Members of the chorus will be asked to post 1-2 questions on the wiki the night before discussion before midnight and to post 1-2 paragraph responses after the discussion. It is advisable that you start looking at the weekly topics soon to choose your preferred theme for acting in the chorus.

Take home midterm: There will be a take-home midterm towards the middle of the semester. Students will be given 4-5 essay questions, out of which they will choose two and write essays on those topics over the weekend. (March 12-15)

Poster session: As a class, we will be organizing a poster session at the Theoretical Archaeology Group Meeting at Brown University’s Joukowsky Institute for Archaeology and the Ancient World, which will take place on April 30-May 2, 2010. Students will collaborate in groups of two to prepare a poster on a related topic. Posters will combine visual imagery and text in presenting a case study of politics, identity and archaeology in the Middle East. Poster drafts will be submitted on April 20 and we will hold a critique/review session that day. With feedback from Ömür and your classmates, and after your final revisions, they will be on exhibit at Brown during the conference.

Final Paper: Students will develop their poster presentation topics into individual research papers (12-15 pages for undergraduates, 16-20 for graduate students), (due May 12, 2010).

Grading: Attendance and Participation (including Chorus duty) 30%, Take-home midterm 20% Poster 20% Final Paper 30%
Weekly Schedule

Week 1. (January 28) Introduction

Thursday Introduction: review of the course.

Week 2. (February 2-4) Keywords for this course: archaeology, identity, politics, heritage (and some others).


Optional


Week 3. (February 9-11) Collecting, museums and orientalism in the Late Ottoman Empire: a view from the 19th century


Week 4. (February 16-18) Origins of nationalism and archaeology as an invention of modernity.


February 20-23 Long-weekend

Week 5. (February 25) Turkey: were Hittites Turks? The making of a new national past in Anatolia.

No class on Tuesday (Long weekend)


Week 6. (March 2-4) Egypt’s conflicted antiquities: modernity, identity and archaeology


Week 7. (March 9-11) Israel’s nationhood: Archaeology as “national hobby”


Midterm take-home exam: distributed March 12- due March 15.

Week 8. (March 16-18) Iraq: colonizing Mesopotamia


Week 9. (March 23-25) Archaeology, colonialism, modernity, and heritage in the Middle East: a mid-semester review


March 27-April 4 Spring break

Week 10. (April 6-8) Iraq: Saddam Hussein, Nebuchadnezzar II and Babylon


Week 11. (April 13-15) Nationalism and its visual culture


Thursday: No class. Work on posters. (Ömür’s out of town)

Week 12. (April 20-22) Turkey: construction of multiple pasts at Çatalhöyük

April 20 Tuesday: Drafts of Posters due. Critique/review in class.


April 29: Final posters due

TAG Conference: April 30-May 2, 2010. Poster session at the Joukowsky Institute

Week 14. (May 4-6) Archaeology as political action : Israel and the obsessions with the Biblical past


Final papers due May 12, 2010 Wednesday 5 pm, hard copy in Ömür’s mailbox at the Institute.