

The background of the slide is a photograph of a desert landscape. In the foreground, there is a body of water with a vibrant turquoise hue. To the right, a large, smooth sand dune slopes down towards the water, its surface showing fine ripples. In the distance, more sand dunes are visible under a clear, light blue sky. The overall scene is serene and captures the beauty of a coastal desert environment.

The Suez Canal, Disraeli, Chinese Gordon, the Mahdi, and Beginning Distrust of England

Muhammad Najm Akbar

Gent 413

makbar@mpc.edu

Introduction

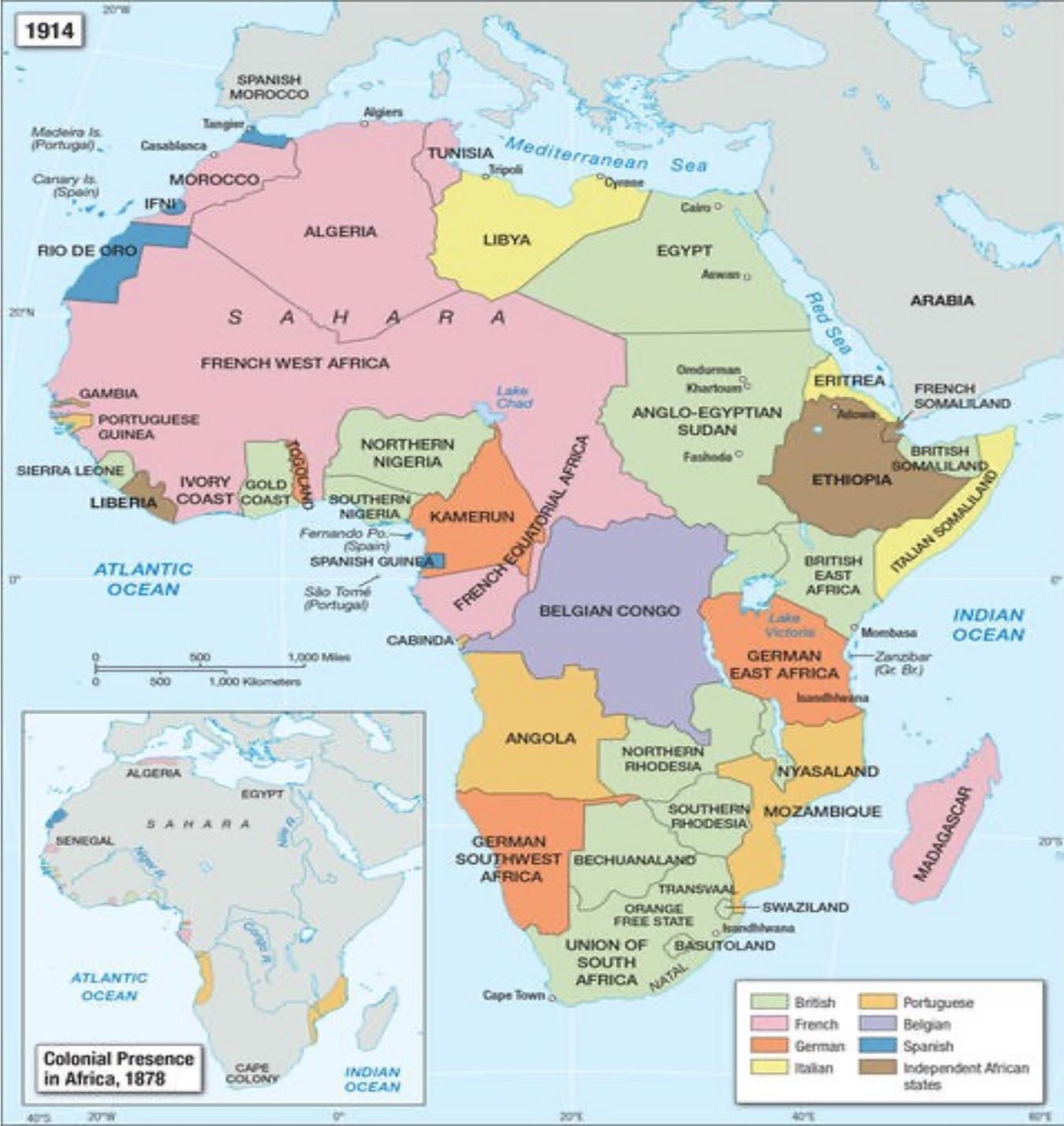
- This week, we focus on imperial infrastructure, two major imperial figures, a politician and a soldier, and a leader of resistance to the imperial project in Africa. They meet in person or in absentia in the strategically location of Egypt and Sudan, which have become a bigger prize with the completion of the Suez Canal.
- Since the fifteenth century, the Cape of Good Hope had been the lifeline of the alternate route from the Mediterranean/Atlantic into the Indian Ocean. The Suez Canal further enhanced the value of the original route as it reduced the travel time and energy costs.
- Currently, London-Mumbai is about 6,300 nautical (1 to 1:15) miles vs 10,700 nautical miles via Cape of Good Hope. Travel time today is about 26 days vs 44 days.

Introduction

- We talked about Egypt last week as part of the scramble for Africa. The British Empire would not let it go.
- Today, we will look at a few pieces of this puzzle because they help us understand the Imperial thinking about their colonial possessions.
- Through three major historical persons, we will also try to understand what trust or distrust of an imperial power means in these historical times.

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CYPRUS

SYRIA

ISRAEL

IRAQ

□ Port Said

Suez Canal

JORDAN

Gulf of Suez

Gulf of Aqaba

EGYPT

SAUDI ARABIA

Red
Sea

The Suez Connection

- Egyptian labor built the Suez Canal between 1859 and 1869, laying down thousands of lives during its construction.
- Egypt wanted to project a pro-Western image on the Suez inauguration. The Khedive invited the Emperor of Austria, the Empress Eugene, the wife of Napoleon III of France, and the Crown Prince of Prussia, as well as writers such as Emile Zola and Henrik Ibsen.
- Simultaneously with the Canal, the Khedive inaugurated an opera house with a performance of Verdi's *Rigoletto*.

The Suez Canal

- European bankers financed the construction of port facilities, railroads, and telegraph lines in Egypt.
- Lesseps raised half of the initial capital of 200 million francs through the French stock exchange. The French government, the Khedive of Egypt, and French banks stepped in to provide for the shortfall.
- The British took a decisive step to gain control over the canal in 1875 when they rescued the financially distressed Egyptian government and purchased the Egyptian ruler, the Khedive's, the second largest portion of the canal stock. France remained the majority shareholder.
- Four years later, France and Britain seized Egypt's treasury to secure their investments.



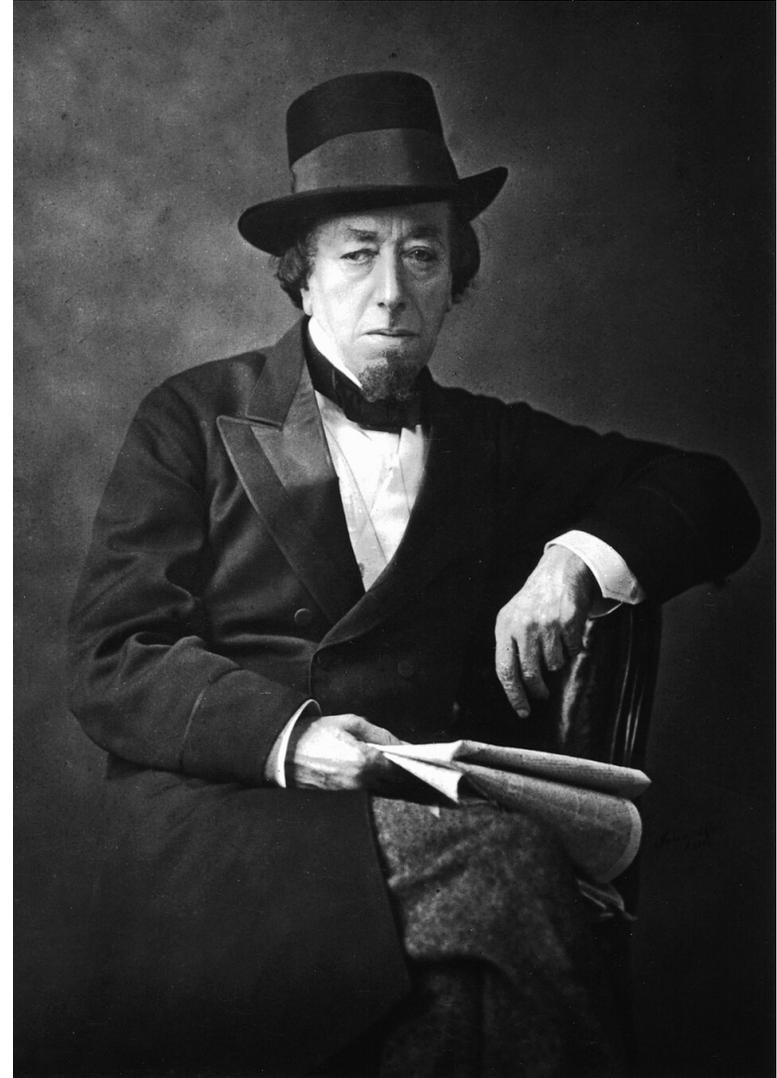
Urabi revolt

- Ahmad Urabi, a non-elite army officer, personified the resentment against the growing Egyptian capitulation before the British-French consortium.
- Although the Khedive negotiated a deal with him in 1881, the movement failed to make a lasting impact because by 1882, the British were in control, beginning with the devastating bombing of Alexandria. They did not leave until 1956.
- The Khedive remained in office, but after 1882, Britain held most of the real power.
- By then, 3000 ships a year passed through the Suez Canal.



Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881)

- Disraeli was the Tory Prime Minister of Britain in 1868 and from 1874 to 1880.
- He was of Italian-Jewish descent but was baptized in 1817 and had an Anglican upbringing since the age of 12.
- The conversion allowed him to become an MP in 1837. The British Parliament excluded Jews until 1858.
- Disraeli, typical of Imperial figures, traveled for sixteen months in the Mediterranean and the Middle Eastern countries beginning in 1830. He was a strong advocate for the empire and particularly emphasized the possession of India.



The Suez Connection

- As Prime Minister, Disraeli claimed success when he bought the Egyptian Khedive (ruler), Ismail Pasha's slightly less than half of the Suez Canal Company's (about 44 percent) shares. The Parliamentary approval was slow in coming, so he used a loan from the Rothschild family to hold the shares until the bargain was confirmed.
- With his emphasis on India, Suez was a crucial passageway. He also won parliament's approval in 1876 to confer on Queen Victoria the title empress of India. His concern for India also defined his policy toward the Ottoman Empire, favoring their control of the straits and confining possible Russian maritime advances to the Black Sea.

The Debt Issues

- Egypt was not alone in borrowing easily available money from European creditors based on poor estimates of future income. Many countries dipped into these pots of money aimed at funding what historian James L. Gelvin termed Defensive Developmentalism on unfavorable terms.
- The Ottoman Empire, between 1854 and 1879, borrowed massively. Because of the unfavorable terms it accepted, of a nominal amount of 256 million Turkish Pounds, it received only 139 million, the rest being discounted.

The Debt Issues

- By 1875, the Ottomans were unable to carry the burden of interest and repayment. In 1881, a Public Debt Administration Committee comprising foreign creditors took over control of most of the Ottoman revenue. They also controlled the Ottoman financial decision-making.
- In Tunis, for debt-servicing reasons, an International Finance Commission coordinated ways of repayment with the government beginning in 1869. Financial problems became one of the reasons advanced by France to take over the country in 1881.
- Egypt had borrowed sixty-eight million pounds between 1862 and 1873, and received about two-thirds after the discount. By 1876, its repayment difficulties became a pretext for the Anglo-French takeover (Hourani, p. 282-283).

Mahdi

- Mahdi became a symbol of resistance to Imperialism, but his struggle was essentially against his northern neighbor, Egypt.
- His name was Muhammad Ahmad (1844-1885). Historian Albert Hourani believes that his followers regarded him as Mahdi, desirous of restoring Islamic justice to society (p. 284).
- Historian Badawi introduces him as a charismatic leader “who proclaimed himself 'The Mahdi,' or the “Chosen One;” that is, a divinely appointed guide (p. 423).



Mahdi: Who?

- Among the Muslims, as regards the Shi'ite sect, belief in the Mahdi is central to it. Among the Sunnis, it is not as strong as among the Shiites, but it is still a part of the Sunni creed. Sunni Muslims expect the advent of the Mahdi, but there is no specific frame for his picture. They feel strengthened by the fact that the Qur'an confirms the ultimate triumph of good over evil, which provides the basis for the continuing expectation of the Mahdi.
- The universal idea of hope in Islam is inherent in the Qur'an and is embodied in the figure of the Mahdi. The expectation of the Mahdi has provided solace and strength to believers in the past and will perhaps continue to do so in the future as well (Zeki Saritoprak, 673-674).

Nubia in Africa

- Sudan is ancient Nubia. Since the dawn of civilization, these two neighbors have had a relationship of amity and hostility.
- Nubia was a corridor between Africa and Egypt and interacted with both cultures.
- During the Middle and New Kingdoms, Egypt expanded into Nubia to control its mineral resources, including gold.
- Between 3100 BCE and 350 CE, Nubia developed a complex political organization, social stratification, metallurgy, monumental buildings, and writing.
- After some five centuries of Egyptian domination, the Nubians repulsed them in 1200 BCE.
- Between 712-660 BCE Nubians ruled Egypt as the Twenty-fifth dynasty.

Nubia

- Nubia remained a Christian civilization for 1000 years, using Greek liturgy and Churches built in the Coptic and Byzantine fashion.
- Aksum had annexed it in the fourth century. Aksum continues to be a Christian-majority state.
- Islam prevailed there only from 1300 onwards.
- The Ottoman rulers of Egypt had expanded into Sudan, but by 1884, the Egyptian rule faced the Mahdi rebellion, and then ended.

Mahdi—Chinese Gordon

- The British had decided to extend their control over the south, coinciding with the rise of the Mahdi.
- Besides Sudan's strategic importance west of the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, the British might have apprehended other European powers taking over as part of the Scramble for Africa.
- General Gordon was Chinese Gordon because his vast engagement with the Imperial expansion had seen him in action in China during the Second Opium War (1856-60) and Taiping Rebellion (1850-64). He also served in the Crimean War (1853-1856).



Chinese Gordon

- Part of the Khedive's army since 1873, Gordon had served in Sudan as Governor General and was proud of eliminating the local slave trade there. He left in 1880.
- Four years later, Mahdi forces trounced an Egyptian-British force, and the British government sent Gordon to evacuate the Egyptian-British civilians and the soldiers. He traveled to Khartoum to oversee the withdrawal of the Egyptian military and the civilian population in response to the rise of the Islamic movement of the Mahdi.

Mahdi-Gordon

- After the Mahdists had inflicted several crushing defeats on the Egyptian forces, Gordon became trapped and overrun by Mahdist troops.
- The British sent a relief expedition to rescue Gordon. However, by the time the expedition arrived, Mahdist troops had murdered and decapitated Gordon – apparently in direct contravention of Ahmad's orders.
- The failed Gordon Relief Mission of 1885 is an essential context to Kitchener's campaign of 1898, which we will discuss in a minute.

Mahdi

- Gordon's end was a blow to British prestige. There was a demand to avenge Gordon, whom many glorified as a Christian hero.
- Mahdi also died in 1885, and Khalifa Abdallahi Muhammad took over as leader of the Mahdia.
- In 1896, responding to an Italian request, Lord Cromer, the consul general of Egypt, deployed Lord Kitchener to avenge Gordon's death. One of Kitchener's battle cries was 'remember Gordon' during the combat.
- Omdurman on 2 September 1898 was the culminating battle of this campaign.

Mahdi

- Omdurman showed, above all, like the Boer Wars, how human capacity to kill had phenomenally increased since the Industrial Revolution.
- We have no idea of the First World War yet, but it will manifest how this destructive capability was pursued, and continued, on a relentlessly upward path.
- Winston Churchill was an officer participating in the 1898 battle of Omdurman in the Sudan. He described the effects of the machine gun on natives in *The River War*, a book that he wrote based on his personal experiences. He said, “It was not a battle but an execution... the bodies were... spread evenly over acres and acres.”
- In the final battle, 11,000 of the Khalifa’s army were killed and 16,000 wounded – although the number of actual fatalities would have been significantly higher owing to the neglect and killing of the wounded. In contrast, Anglo-Egyptian forces lost just 48 men, and 382 were wounded.

Mahdi-Kitchener

- Kitchener was in a vengeful mode, so he bombed Mahdi's tomb. Churchill described in *The River War* that his tomb had been for more than ten years the most sacred place and holy thing that the people of the Sudan knew. The British army decided to destroy it as its presence was a conspicuous memorial to his victory over Gordon.
- Kitchener explained to the Queen why Mahdi's body was dug up, and his skull removed.
- The British had avenged Gordon's death and symbolically 'killed' the Mahdi in a mirror image of the treatment of Gordon's corpse. They had also sent an unmistakably firm signal to all those who wanted to resist.

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- The British built an empire on the financial and technical strength of joint stock companies, which funded and secured colonial expansion in exchange for monopolies on trading opportunities. As their network expanded, the British Navy offered protection, and the British agents secured the trading routes. The Suez was one example.
- The British administrators, in the meantime, crafted theories and justifications for the imperial enterprise.
- Disraeli, for example, was a novelist as well. Besides several other aspects of his life, his novel Tancred, or The New Crusade (1847), reflected his long travel of sixteen months through the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

The Trust

- This is how Disraeli describes Asia on page 178 of Tancred,
“... Asia has been overrun by Turks and Tatars. For nearly 500 years, the true oriental mind has been enthralled. Arabia alone has remained free and faithful to the divine tradition. From its bosom we shall go forth and sweep away the mouldering remnants of the Tataric system; And then, when the east has resumed its indigenous intelligence, when angels and prophets again mingled with humanity, the sacred quarter of the globe will recover its primeval and divine supremacy; It will act upon the modern empires, and the faint-hearted faith of Europe, which is but the shadow of a shade, will become as vigorous as befits men who are in sustained communication with the Creator.”

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Lord Cromer (Evelyn Baring), the Governor General of Egypt for a quarter century, and an old colonial hand, wrote in a 1908 essay:

“To be more explicit, what is meant when it is said that the commercial spirit should be under some control is this -- that in dealing with Indians, or Egyptians, or Shilluks, or Zulus, the first question is to consider what these people, who are all nationally speaking, more or less in statu pupillari, themselves think is best in their own interest, although this is a point which deserves serious consideration. But it is essential that each special issue should be decided mainly with reference to what, by the light of Western knowledge and experience tempered by local consideration, we conscientiously think is best for the subject, race, without reference to any real or supposed advantage which may accrue to England as a nation, or – as is more frequently the case -- to the special interests represented by someone or more influential classes of Englishmen (Quoted in Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, p. 37).

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Lord Cromer (Evelyn Baring), contd.

If the British nation as a whole persistently bears this principle in mind, and insists sternly on its application, though we can never create a patriotism akin to that based on the affinity of race or community of language, we may perhaps foster some sort of cosmopolitan allegiance grounded on the respect always accorded to superior talents and unselfish conduct, and on the gratitude derived both from favors conferred and from those to come. There may then at all events be some hope that the Egyptian will hesitate before he throws his lot with any future Urabi.....Even the Central African savage may eventually learn to chant a hymn in honor of Astraea Redux, as represented by the British official who denies him gin but gives him justice. More than this, commerce will gain (Quoted in Edward Said's *Orientalism*, p. 37).

Beyond Imperialism: Orientalism

- Edward Said asks a question (p. 49) in his *Orientalism*, “What specialized skills, what imaginative pressures, what institutions and traditions, what cultural forces produce such similarity in the description of the Orient to be found in Cromer, Balfour, and our contemporary statesmen?” He deconstructed the phenomenon as, “the reservoir of accredited knowledge, the codes of Orientalist orthodoxy” (p. 39). Imperial agents like Cromer not only colonized and governed, but they also codified their thoughts.
- Said explains that Orientalism arrogates to itself the near-perfect description of the Oriental who, among other characteristics, cannot express himself. Orient is Kuchek Hanem of Flaubert (he visited Egypt 1849-51), who cannot speak for herself, but he knows what she would like to tell the world. The dominated and the occupier have their roles in the Orientalist thought process. Those who dominate define what the dominated constitute.

Beyond Imperialism: Orientalism

- This is what Earl Cromer thought about the Orient in chapter XXXIV of his book, where he defines it, “The mind of the true Eastern is at once lethargic and suspicious; he does not want to be reformed, and he is convinced that, if the European wishes to reform him, the desire springs from sentiments which bode him no good. Moreover, his conservatism is due to an instinct of self-preservation, and to a dim perception that, if he allows himself to be even slightly performed, all the things to which he attaches importance will not merely be changed in this or that particular, but will rather be swept off the face of the Earth” (Cromer, p. 161).

Beyond Imperialism: Orientalism

- Cromer continues, “Compare again, the languages, art, architecture, and music of the Oriental with those of the European. It will be found that almost on almost every point the practices and tastes of the one are opposed to those of the other.
- Oriental alphabets are intricate. The Turk, the Arab, and the Persian begin to write on the right side of the page; the short vowels are almost always omitted. European alphabets, on the other hand, are simple. The European begins right on the left-hand side of the page.
- Orientals continue to copy from one style of art. European art is varied and constantly develops new forms.

Beyond Imperialism: Orientalism

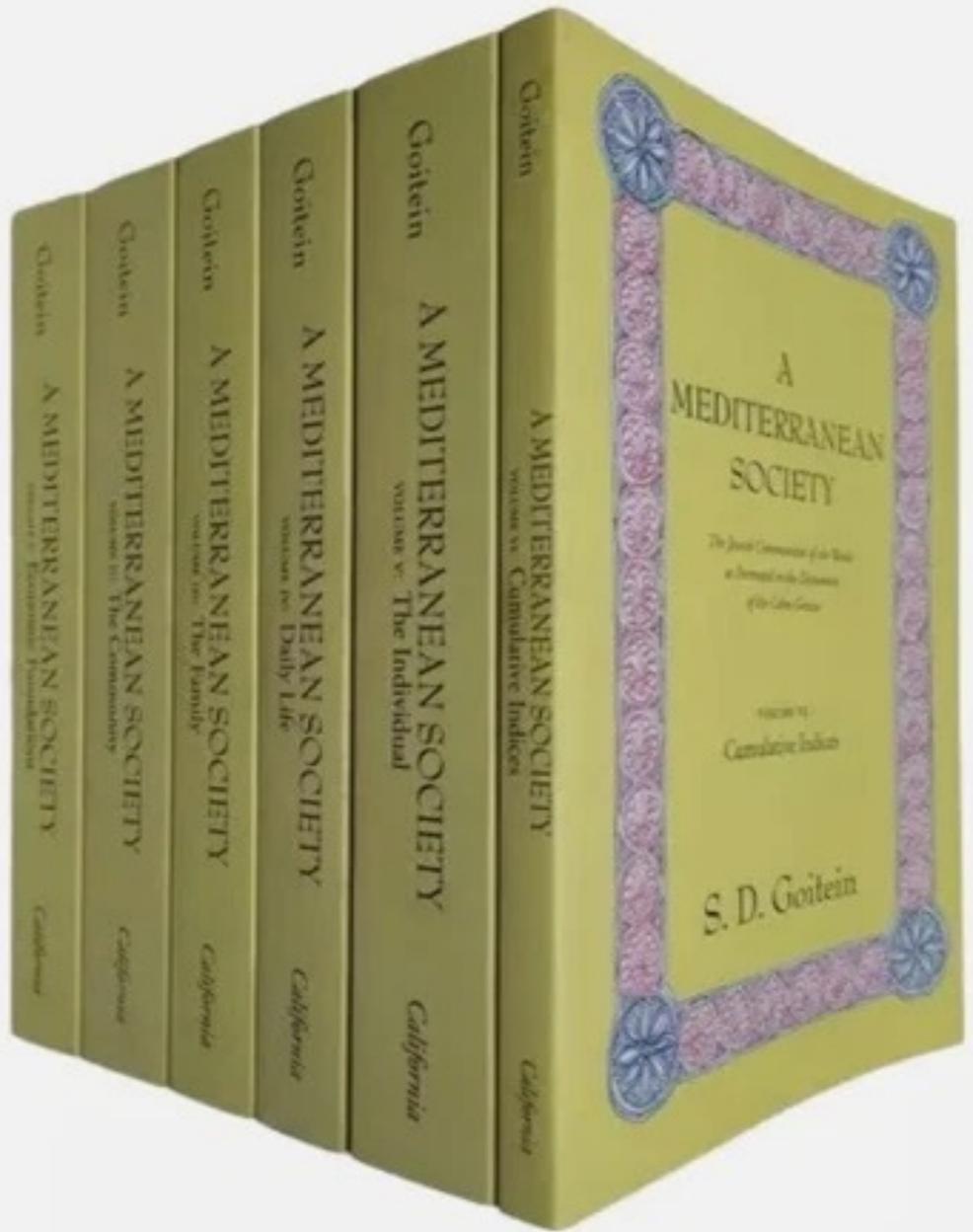
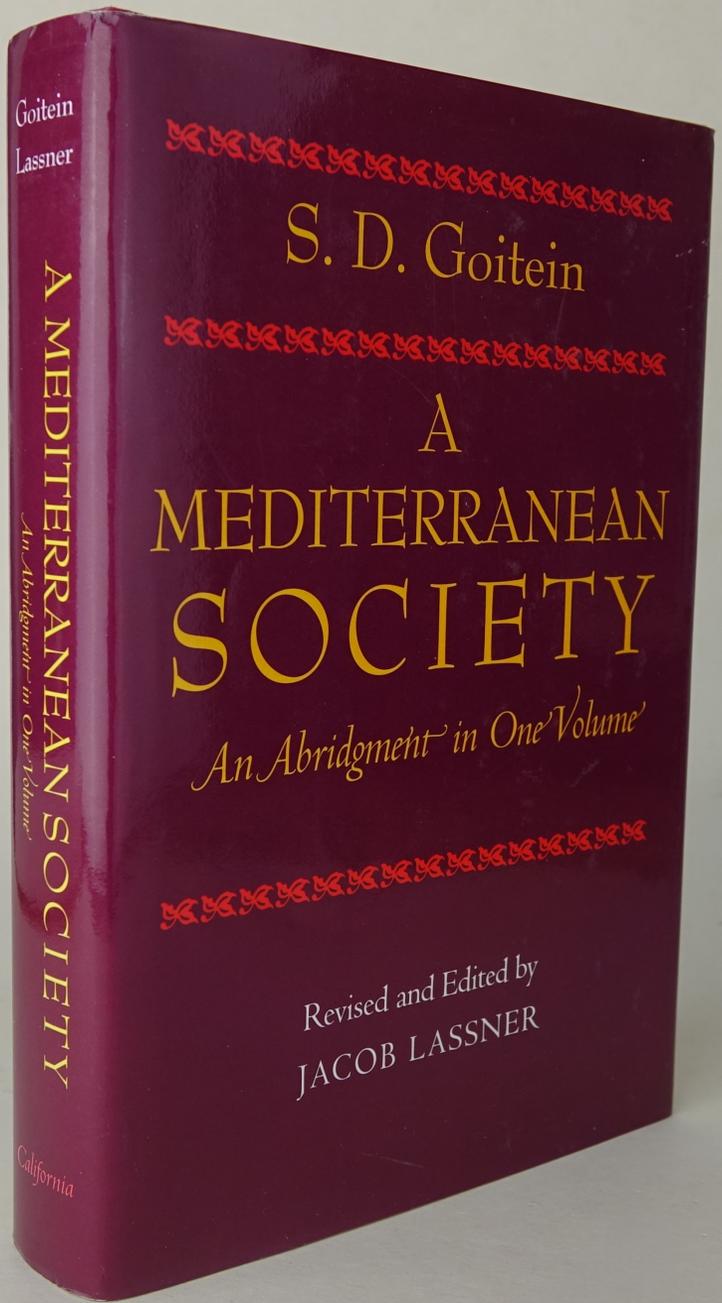
- Oriental music, which is the same in all parts of the East, is wanting in harmony and monotonous to the ears of most Europeans. European music, on the other hand, generally fails to please Orientals (p. 163-164).
- Turn again, to the most ordinary customs and expressions, the dress, etc., of the Oriental, as compared with the European. It would be found that even in the most trivial matters, the Oriental will generally do or say the opposite of what the European would do or say under similar circumstances. Numerous instances in point will occur to anyone who has even a slight acquaintance with eastern social life” (p. 164).

A Mediterranean Society

- This is to offer some historical contrast. In 1890, a unique Geniza in the Egyptian capital.
- Geniza means a repository of discarded writings awaiting burial because Hebrew, like Arabic, was the language of God. They found it in Fustat, which was a Muslim capital until 969, while Fatimids built Cairo during their reign, 969-1171.
- In 1890, the Geniza was discovered during the renovation of a Palestinian synagogue dating back to 1002. The treasure was shipped from Egypt to various destinations, while some American collectors deposited their acquisitions at Dropsie College of Philadelphia in 1891.

A Mediterranean Society

- Professor Shelomo Dov Goitein (1900-1985, Princeton University) devoted the last thirty years of his long and productive life to the study of these Geniza archives, deciphering the language of the documents and organizing what he called a "marvelous treasure trove of manuscripts" into a coherent, fascinating picture of the society that created them, and published a six-volume compendium about them.
- He also published an abridged edition in a single volume



A Mediterranean Society

- This is how Goitein sums up the rights of minorities as reflected in the archives: “...the non-Muslim communities formed a state not only within a particular Muslim polity, but also beyond its confines” (p. 193).
- Jewish authorities, religious and lay, ecumenical, territorial, and local, handled Jewish denominational matters. Yeshiva, a pre-Islamic institution as well as the diocesan organization of the Diaspora, remained autochthonous. Laity, unlike Islam, fully participated in the Jewish ecumenical deliberations. Jewish education was indigenous to religious needs, though it was “open to Islamic influences because of the close affinity between the two religions” (p. 194).

A Mediterranean Society

- The Muslim state remained concerned mainly with security and justice as well as revenue, allowing minorities to administer their internal affairs. The Jewish community fractured into sects internally. Muslim authorities did not unite or divide them.
- “...the state had no intrinsic interest in the internal affairs of the Jews...” but it wanted them to be “responsive to the needs of the state and the legal demands placed on them by Islam” (p. 195).
- “It is fair to say that while the Christians and Jews shared with their Muslim compatriots a common language, economy, and many social notions and customs, their communal life remained largely their own” (p. 196).
- Imperialism generated and prescribed a new narrative for the

The Trust-Distrust-Relationships

- Profiteering and domination, both physical and intellectual, drove colonialism. The colonized people experienced consequences of this adventure in their daily lives whether they dug canals, built railway or telegraph lines, extracted minerals, and natural resources for the masters, produced agricultural commodities the factories and consumers in the Mother Countries needed, bought their manufactured goods out of their meager incomes, faced Maxim guns, fought their wars, or coped with the sustained humiliation that a superior race inflicted on them, physically and intellectually.
- Violent, oppressive, exploitative, and degrading, but it was a relationship, a long series of complex interactions, that changed the geopolitical, social, and economic ecosystems of the colonized people forever.

Email

Questions/Comments

makbar@mpc.edu