<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>JULY 26, 2013</th>
<th>NOTES BY</th>
<th>DENIS BAŠIĆ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

GEOGRAPHY OF THE MIDDLE EAST
SHWEDLER ET AL., CHAPTER 2
Landscapes of the Middle East
Rub‘al-Khali (the Empty Quarter) in Saudi Arabia
the coral reefs of the Red Sea (Egypt)
Permanent snowfields and cirque glaciers on the slopes of the great volcanic peaks of Mount Ararat (5,165 meters) in eastern Anatolia (Turkey)
Permanent snowfields and cirque glaciers on the slopes of the great volcanic peak of Mount Damavand, the highest peak in Iran (more than 5,600 meters), in the Elburz Mountains.
Dasht-e Kavir Desert in Central Iran
Wetlands & Marshes of the Nile Delta
Major Ethnic Groups, Religions, & Languages of the Middle East
Major Ethnic Groups

The Middle East is today home to numerous long established ethnic groups, including; Arabs, Turks, Persians, Jews, Kurds, Somalis, Assyrians (Chaldo-Assyrians), Arameans-Syriacs, Egyptian Copts, Armenians, Azeris, Maltese, Circassians, Greeks, Turcomans, Shabaks, Yazidis, Mandeans, Georgians, Roma, Gagauz, Mhallami and Samaritans.
Religions of the Middle East

- The Middle East is very diverse when it comes to religions, many of which originated there.

- **Islam** in its many forms is by far the largest religion in the Middle East, but other faiths that originated there, such as **Judaism** and **Christianity**, are also well represented.

- There are also important minority religions like the **Bahá'í Faith**, **Yazdânism**, **Zoroastrianism**, **Mandeanism**, **Druze**, **Yarsan**, **Yazidism** and **Shabakism**, and in ancient times the region was home to **Mesopotamian Religion**, **Canaanite Religion**, **Manicheanism**, **Mithraism** and various **Monotheist Gnostic sects**.
Languages of the Middle East

The five top languages, in terms of numbers of speakers, are Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Berber (which is spoken across North Africa), and Kurdish (Kurmanji, Sorani, Zaza-Gorani). Arabic and Berber represent the Afro-Asiatic language family. Persian and Kurdish belong to the Indo-European language family. And Turkish belongs to Turkic language family. About 20 minority languages are also spoken in the Middle East.

Other languages spoken in the region include Semitic languages such as Hebrew and Mesopotamian Aramaic dialects spoken mainly by Assyrians and Mandeans. Also to be found are Armenian, Azerbaijani, Somali, Circassian, smaller Iranian languages (such as Baluchi), smaller Turkic languages (such as Gagauz), Shabaki, Yazidi, Roma, Georgian, Greek, and several Modern South Arabian languages such as Geez. Maltese is also linguistically and geographically a Middle Eastern language.
**Other Languages spoken in the Middle East**

- **English** is commonly taught and used as a second language, especially among the middle and upper classes, in countries such as Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Iran, Iraq, Qatar, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates and Kuwait. It is also a main language in some of the Emirates of the United Arab Emirates.

- **French** is taught and used in many government facilities and media in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, and Lebanon. It is taught in some primary and secondary schools of Egypt, Israel and Syria.

- **Urdu** is widely spoken by migrant communities in many Middle Eastern countries, such as Saudi Arabia (where 20-25% of the population is South Asian), the United Arab Emirates (where 50-55% of the population is South Asian), Israel, and Qatar, which have large numbers of Pakistani immigrants.

- The largest **Romanian**-speaking community in the Middle East is found in Israel, where as of 1995 Romanian is spoken by 5% of the population. **Russian** is also spoken by a large portion of the Israeli population, because of emigration in the late 1990s.
Boundaries
The 19th century nomenclature

- The Times (London) published *The Times Atlas* in 1895 that provides a series of maps entitled “The Balkan Peninsula,” “The Caucasus,” “Asia Minor and Persia,” “Egypt,” and “Palestine,” which is a proof that the term “Middle East” was not officially used at the time.

- *Al-Iraq* referred to the area around the Shatt al-Arab waterway, and *al-Jazira* was the lands between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, including Baghdad.

- *Sham* indicated the area immediately around Damascus, and *Bilad al-Sham* (or country of Sham) the larger region now comprising Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine.

- Egyptians still call their country *Misr*, but originally the term referred only to the Nile Delta and its narrow valley, not to the vast territory contained within its present-day boundaries.
What is the Middle East?

The term “Middle East” is itself an unabashedly Eurocentric term. It seems to have been used first in 1902 in reference to British naval strategy in the Gulf at a time of increased Russian influence around the Caspian Sea and German plans for a Berlin-to-Baghdad railway.

Largely through the columns of the Times (London) the term “Middle East” achieved wider circulation and came to denote an area of strategic concern to Britain lying between the Near East (another Eurocentric designation, essentially synonymous with the area remaining under the control of the Ottoman Empire), the expanding Russian Empire in Central Asia, and the Indian Raj.

During World War I, the British expeditionary force to Mesopotamia was generally referred to as “Middle East Forces,” as distinct from Britain’s “Near East Forces,” which operated from bases in Egypt. After the war, these two military commands were integrated as an economy measure, but the “Middle East” designation was retained.
Syria, for instance, is a term that first appears in Greek histories and geographies and was subsequently adopted by the Romans as the name for an administrative province. But from the time of the Arab-Islamic conquest of the seventh century, the name virtually disappeared from local use. Its reappearance dates from the nineteenth century, largely through the writing and influence of Western scholars.

Similarly, although Europeans have been referring to the lands of Anatolia and Asia Minor as Turkey since the time of the Crusades, the inhabitants of this region did not use this name until the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923.
Map 2.2 Extent of the Ottoman Empire
Political Maps of the Contemporary Middle East?
Map 2.1 Political Map of the Middle East
THE MIDDLE EAST IN A NARROWER SENSE OR THE ISLAMIC CORE AREA
Five Parts Making the Islamic “Core Area”

- **Levant** (from eastern Mediterranean coast to the Euphrates river, and from the Taurus mountains to the northern border of the Arabian peninsula.)

- **Mesopotamia** (the territory between and surrounding the Euphrates and Tigris rivers)
  [Note: Levant + Mesopotamia = Fertile Crescent]

- **Iran**
- **Egypt**
- **Arabian Peninsula**
Aridity and Water
Irrigation Systems in the Middle East

Like the basin irrigation system developed in the Nile valley, other traditional water management devices such as the *qanats* of Iran, the *shadufs* of Egypt, and the *norias* of the Orontes River in Syria had a common purpose: to make effective use of a critical resource and thereby enable societies to survive and flourish under conditions of scarcity and uncertainty.
Egyptian Shaduf

Watch here how an Egyptian shaduf works.
Iranian Qanat

Watch here how an Iranian qanat works.
Syrian Norias (Water Wheels)

Watch here how a Syrian Noria works.
Water & Boundaries
Dam Projects in the Middle East

Several newly independent Middle Eastern states in the mid-twentieth century embarked on dam projects. The construction of the **Aswan High Dam** in the 1960s, for example, enabled all of **Egypt** to be irrigated on a perennial basis; made possible two, and in some cases even three, crops per year; and generated power for countrywide electrification projects.
The Problem with Hydrological Boundaries

- In the Middle East, the problem is greatly complicated by the uneven distribution of water resources and by the lack of correspondence between political and hydrological boundaries.

- Roughly two-thirds of the water supply available to Arab countries has its source in non-Arab countries (Gleick, 1994).

- In Israel, by some estimates, between one-half and two-thirds of the water currently used for irrigation and domestic and industrial purposes actually originates outside the country’s pre-1967 boundaries.
In 1964, the Arab states made plans to divert the flow of the Hasbani and Banias headwaters of the Jordan River away from Israel. (The Hasbani, which originates in Lebanon, was to be diverted into the Litani River and from there to the Mediterranean Sea, and the Banias, originating in Syria, to a storage reservoir in Jordan on the Yarmuk River via a canal along the western edge of the Golan Heights.) These plans were brought to a halt by an Israeli attack on the construction works (Manners, 1974). And while water was not an overriding issue in the subsequent Six Day War of June 1967, the occupation by Israel of Syrian territory on the Golan Heights, a strategic plateau in southern Syria that included the Banias Springs during that war, effectively extended Israel’s hydrostrategic control over this part of the Jordan drainage basin and cut Syria off from a major aquifer.
In October 2002, Lebanon’s completion of a pumping project involving the Wazzani Springs, an important contributor to the flow of the Hasbani particularly during the dry summer months, provoked threats of retaliatory action from Israel and resurrected old arguments and animosities over rights to use the Jordan waters.
Turkey vs. Syria & Iraq

The Euphrates rises in eastern Turkey, punches its way through the edge of the Anatolian Plateau in a series of dramatic gorges, then flows across the increasingly arid steppes of Syria and Iraq to a confluence with the Tigris River (which also originates in Turkey) just above Basra, Iraq. From there, the two rivers flow together as the Shatt al-Arab to the Gulf. Although most of the huge drainage basin of the Euphrates is actually in Iraq, nearly 90 percent of the annual flow of the river is generated within Turkey. This means that the downstream users, Syria and Iraq, are vulnerable to Turkey’s future development plans for the Euphrates.
Dams in the Tigris Euphrates River Basins
Iraqi & Syrian Dams

- In the twentieth century, first during the British Mandate and later after independence, the irrigation systems were rehabilitated and new control structures erected.

- In the 1970s, Iraq began planning a major storage reservoir that, like the Aswan High Dam, was intended to provide long-term storage. Despite setbacks caused by war, Iraq’s long-term plans envision greater use of Euphrates water.

- Syria, like Iraq, is steadily making greater use of Euphrates water for irrigation development and power generation and in 1973 completed the huge al-Thawra Dam.
**Turkish Dams**

*Turkey* is currently in the process of implementing a truly massive water development project in southeastern Anatolia, the Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi (GAP), that involves both the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers. If fully implemented, the GAP would involve as many as fourteen dams and storage reservoirs on the Euphrates and eight on the Tigris, plus additional power-generating facilities.

This immense undertaking is intended to pump new life into Turkey’s hardscrabble, semiarid southeast provinces where living standards are far below the national average, but it is clearly more than just another water development project. These provinces are home to the majority of Turkey’s *Kurdish population*. By providing people with a more secure and comfortable livelihood, the government hopes to undercut support for the Kurdish separatist movement and bring an end to a costly and bloody conflict.
By some estimates, the Atatürk Dam and other proposed storage and diversion projects on the Euphrates could reduce downstream flows to Syria by 40 percent and to Iraq by as much as 80 percent, especially during the dry years.

Clearly, if all the proposed water projects are carried out, the total water demand will be well in excess of the normal flow of the river.

Moreover, water quality is likely to be an issue for downstream users since an increasing proportion of the available flow will consist of return irrigation flows containing high concentrations of agricultural chemicals and salts.
Unfortunately, in none of the major river basins do there exist formal agreements among all riparian states (those bordering on rivers) over water rights; there is no such agreement for the Jordan River or for the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, and legal agreements for the Nile River involve only Egypt and Sudan.

Since its independence, South Sudan has taken the position that it is not bound by the terms of the 1959 Nile Waters Treaty that in essence allocated the entire annual flow of the Nile between Egypt and Sudan. Instead South Sudan has indicated that it will join other upstream riparian states in the Cooperative Framework Agreement (already signed by Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Burundi), which is intended to promote their own water development needs and secure what they believe would be a more equitable distribution of the basin’s water resources.
**Egypt & Sudan vs. their Neighbors**

- **Boutros Boutros-Ghali**’s comment when he was Egypt’s foreign minister to the effect that “the next war in our region will be over the waters of the Nile, not politics,” has been widely repeated (for example, see Klare 2001).
Wetlands of the Middle East

- The region’s marshes and wetlands have often been targets for major hydraulic engineering projects because they are perceived as empty spaces that waste potentially valuable land and water resources. But water is more than just a commodity with economic value to society, a resource to be developed, and its flow regulated on a liter-by-liter basis: water has other values and meanings to those living in the region.

- The coastal lagoons of the Nile Delta, the marshes of the Shatt al-Arab, Lake Hula in Israel, Jordan’s Azraq oasis, Lake Ishkeul in Tunisia, and other wetlands scattered throughout the region were once highly productive ecosystems that provided habitat and sustenance for diverse communities of plants and animals.
Marshland of Shat Al-’Arab
From Wetlands to Dry Lands
The Destruction of the Mesopotamian Marshlands

1973

2000

Note: These two maps are sourced from satellite images and maps originally created by Hassan Partow, GRID-Geneva.
Source: Hassan Partow, The Mesopotamian Marshlands: Demise of an Ecosystem, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Division of Early Warning and Assessment (DEWA), 2001
Water distribution

- The Egypt, with a population over 80 million, ranks below the UN water poverty indicator of 1,000 cubic meters of water per person a year.

- In recent years, the state water utility has raised rates for residents in downtown Cairo. In 2004, the Egyptian government privatized its water utility under direction from the World Bank on the grounds that privatization increases “efficiency” and as a condition for loans. To be a profit-generating entity, the utility ensures that water flows uninterrupted to paying customers largely in wealthy neighborhoods, but provides less reliable service to other neighborhoods (Piper, 2012).
Rain as Mercy

This linking of the sacred and the secular, of water and life, is eloquently conveyed in a story Annemarie Schimmel relates about the puzzling question she was first asked in Anatolia by an old woman, “Ankara’da rahmet var mı?” [Is there mercy in Ankara?] I wondered what the question might mean in a casual conversation with some unknown person. But it meant “Is there rain in Ankara?”

In Turkish, rahmet means both God’s mercy and the blessing of rain, for it is through the blessing of rain that everything that is seemingly dead is made alive again. (1985:6)
In 1900, perhaps 10% of the Middle Eastern population lived in urban settlements; by 2000, an estimated 59% resided in urban communities.
Geographic Location of Istanbul

Istanbul is the only city in the world located on two continents - Asia & Europe
In the 4th century, the emperor Constantine moved the seat of the Roman Empire from Rome to the site of a former Greek settlement, Byzantium, located on a promontory bordered on one side by the Golden Horn and on the other by the Sea of Marmara. Although the city’s official name was always Konstantinoupolis Nea Rome, “the city of Constantine that is the new Rome,” it quickly became known as Constantinople, a name that retained currency even among Ottomans, whose documents and coins frequently referred to the city as Konstaniniye until the end of the Ottoman Empire.
Hagia Sophia

Christianity enjoyed a special status in Constantin’s new Rome, which was seen as a sacred city, its churches and monasteries housing a unique collection of holy relics and shrines that symbolized God’s special favor.

Justinian’s great church of *Haghia Sophia*, built between 532 and 537 C.E., its domed basilica rising above the city, epitomized the close relationship between the Byzantine state and the Christian church.

But other buildings and monuments—palaces, walls, columns, churches, and aqueducts—remain embedded within today’s urban fabric to recall more than 1,000 years of Roman-Byzantine rule.
Hagia Sophia (6th century)
Hagia Sophia

... is a former patriarchal basilica, later a mosque, now a museum, in Istanbul, Turkey. Famous in particular for its massive dome, it is considered the epitome of Byzantine architecture. It was the largest cathedral in the world for nearly a thousand years, until the completion of the Medieval Seville Cathedral in 1520.
Hagia Sophia

Restored Orthodox Christian Frescos in the Hagia Sophia Museum, Istanbul, Turkey
Istanbul or Islambol

When the Ottomans captured the city in 1453 after an eight-week siege, Sultan Mehmet II inherited a prized imperial city but one in a sad state of dilapidation. The sultan initiated a massive program of repopulation and reconstruction intended to restore the city to its past grandeur and prosperity.

Thousands of people were relocated to the city, since the 15th century known popularly as Istanbul, from all quarters of the empire. These included skilled artisans and craftspeople to assist in the immense task of reconstruction. Transforming the city were new palaces; great mosques with their schools, libraries, and charitable institutions; extensive bazaars and markets; and improved systems of water supply. These were the symbols of power and prosperity befitting the capital of a great empire.
The Topkapı Palace served as the Palace to the Ottoman Sultans from 1478-1856
The Topkapı Palace
Sultan Ahmet Mosque (The Blue Mosque), located right across from Hagia Sophia was completed in 1616.
The 19th century Istanbul

*Istiklal Cadesi* (Independence Avenue) built in the 19th century European Style
The Dolmabahçe Palace was the seat of the Ottoman sultans from 1856-1922
The world's largest Bohemian crystal chandelier is in the Ceremonial Hall (Muayede Salonu). The chandelier, a gift from Queen Victoria, has 750 lamps and weighs 4.5 tonnes.

Dolmabahçe has the largest collection of Bohemian and Baccarat crystal chandeliers in the world, and one of the great staircases has balusters of Baccarat crystal.
Istanbul in the 20th century

During the Turkish War of Independence (1919-1923), Ankara became the capital of the emerging Turkish Republic since Istanbul was occupied by the Allied Powers. Ankara was a very small town at the beginning of the 20th century that eventually turned into a modern city.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Istanbul, on the other side, had already begun to spread beyond the land walls that delimited the Byzantine-Ottoman city at the head of the Golden Horn. Today, the city’s boundaries extend for miles along the Bosporus and along the European and Asian shores of the Sea of Marmara. Villages that in the 1950s retained a distinctive identity now remain only as names on a map, submerged beneath a tidal wave of immigrants.
The construction during the 1970s and 1980s of two bridges across the Bosporus, linking Europe and Asia, symbolized the emergence of this new greater metropolitan Istanbul. In 2012, plans for a new bridge sparked a backlash from environmentalists, who worried about traffic and the further loss of green space.
Fatih Sultan Mehmet Bridge (1986-1988)
Fatih Sultan Mehmet Bridge (1986-1988)
Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge (planned)

Besides the environmental objections to the building of the third bridge, there have been serious objections to the name choice, which were also expressed during the recent protests in Istanbul in June 2013.

The name of the bridge was announced by State President Abdullah Gül at the ground-breaking ceremony as the Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge, in honor of Ottoman Sultan Selim I (1465–1520). The choice of name of the bridge led to protests by Alevis in Turkey because of the role of Sultan Selim I, nicknamed “the Grim” due to his cruelty, in the Ottoman persecution of Alevis. In 1514, Selim I ordered the massacre of 40,000 Anatolian Alevites (Qizilbash), whom he considered heretics, reportedly proclaiming that “the killing of one Alevite had as much otherworldly reward as killing 70 Christians.”
Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge (planned)
Istanbul Slums

According to David Smith of the Affordable Housing Institute, “every time there is urbanization, there is slums - East end of London, slums of Manhattan...” Istanbul has its slums, too. To learn more about beautiful and not so beautiful sides of Istanbul, watch these short videos:

- Historic Istanbul (video)
- Modern Istanbul (video)
- David Smith on Istanbul Slums (video)
- Slum Stories - Turkey (video)
Cairo

- Cairo was originally laid out by the Fatimid ruler Mu‘izz al-Din in the tenth century to serve as a formal, ordered imperial capital next to the bustling commercial town of Fustat. Fustat itself had grown from the encampment of the Arab army that laid siege to the fortified Byzantine settlement of Babylon during the Arab conquest of Egypt in 640 CE.

- By one account the conquering Fatimid general “carried with him precise plans for the construction of a new princely city which Mu‘izz envisaged as the seat of a Mediterranean Empire.” The new city was named al-Qahira, the victorious city, and its monumental architecture was to become a favorite subject of European artists.
Fatimid Cairo

Al-Mo’ez Street
The illuminated Sultan Al-Mansour Qalawun complex on Al-Mo’ez street, a complex that was consisting of a hospital, a school, a mausoleum and a mosque, in the historical Fatimid Cairo, Egypt.
Fatimid Cairo

Fatimid Mosque, Al-‘Aqmar (12th c.)
In 1867, the ruler of Egypt, **Isma‘il Pasha**, who already had a keen interest in urban development, attended the Exposition Universelle in Paris. There he reportedly met with Baron Georges-Eugène Haussman, the urban planner who had remade Paris into the city of broad boulevards and gardens we know today. Eager to create a modern capital before the deluge of foreign visitors who would arrive following the completion of the Suez Canal, Isma‘il quickly translated Haussman’s principles into a new plan for Cairo. With no time to waste, Isma‘il chose to leave the medieval city essentially as it was, without gas, water, sanitation, or paved streets. Instead, he concentrated on building a new European-style city to the west, complete with Haussman-style boulevards, parks, squares, villas, theaters, and an opera house. This was the city foreigners would see, and their only forays into the old Cairo would be as tourists viewing the scattered monuments of a distant past.
Paris on the Nile (19th c.)
Modern Cairo
Modern Cairo
Modern Cairo

Cairo, which at the beginning of the nineteenth century had a population of around 250,000, had grown to a city of 1 million people by the mid-1930s. By 1960 Greater Cairo’s population had reached 3.6 million, and by 1970 more than 7 million. In the 2006 census, the population of the metropolis (made up by the governorates of Cairo, Giza, and Qalubiya) is estimated to be near 20 million people. Put slightly differently, in the past forty years, Cairo has added to its population three cities comparable to the one that existed in 1960.

Clearly, the pace of urbanization has overwhelmed planners. Traffic congestion, lack of services, loss of amenities and open space, air pollution, inadequate water supply, and overloaded sewage treatment systems have become an all-too-familiar experience in many cities.
Neoliberal economic policies, encouraged by world financial institutions, and which in theory liberate entrepreneurial practices based on free trade, free markets, and private property rights, have been partially adopted by many authoritarian regimes in the Middle East in a way that has cemented the power of these regimes and rewarded supportive behavior by institutions, companies, and individuals who had sufficient wealth to participate in the new economy and reinforce the system.
Effects of Neoliberalism on Cairo

Within Cairo, for example, government-owned land has been opened for real estate development in the form of upscale residential subdivisions, shopping malls, and office space. Planners have elected to build elevated highways through neighborhoods, facilitating movement between the new high-end residential suburbs on the city’s periphery and the banks, offices, and ministries in the center. Older neighborhoods near the center have been cleared away to make room for modern luxury apartments, conference centers, and five-star hotels, and the former residents relocated in public housing projects.
Satellite Cities

David Sims, an urban planner at the American University in Cairo, celebrates the resiliency of Cairo’s residents for their ability to create and manage the “informal” city despite government policy indifferent to their needs. He notes that after thirty years of development, the carefully planned satellite cities developed around Cairo house only 800,000 people while 11 million Egyptians live in the informal *ashwa’iyyat* (spontaneous communities.)
Sims (2010) points out that only 14 percent of Cairo’s population owns cars, yet transportation investments by the government have been almost wholly in new roads and highways. Infrastructure that privileges automobiles generates an urban landscape that is hostile to pedestrians. Yet as with housing, urban residents without cars have started to appropriate these spaces.

New appendages to cities in the Middle East often carry an entrance fee, whether it is actual money or a proper dress code or a car; inequality is inscribed into the infrastructure itself and development is uneven.
An innovative proposal for green skyscraper in Cairo by Reese J Campbell, United States
Ashwa’iyyat - spontaneous communities
By one estimate the *ashwa’iyyat* (spontaneous communities) areas of Cairo house more than 11 million people in Greater Cairo. In Turkey, such spontaneous settlements are called *gecekondu*—literally, “placed there at night”—reflecting the speed with which houses are illegally erected on vacant land.
Cairo’s City of the Dead

Temporary housing has been transformed into a more permanent feature of most large Middle Eastern cities, with numerous local variations such as Cairo’s City of the Dead, where families have taken over the aboveground tombs for housing.
To learn more about life in Cairo watch these short videos:

- The Real Cairo 1&2 (video)
- Cairo, a Divided City (video)
- The City of the Dead - Al-Qarafa Cairo (video)
- The Trash City of Cairo (video)