Woolf Institute Summer School 2021
Religion and Society from the Medieval to the Modern

Led by Dr Esther-Miriam Wagner, the Summer School examines the interactions between religion and society and between the different religious communities in Europe and the Middle East from the medieval era to modern times.

This module introduces students to the study of religion in society and to different aspects of the history of interfaith relations in Europe and in the Middle East, and aims to equip them with the required analytical tools, bibliographical background and the necessary objectivity for the study of interfaith relations. This will include introductions to anthropology of religion, decolonisation, the shared history of religious law, insights into medieval and early-modern everyday life in the Middle East through the sources of the Cairo Genizah (‘history from below’), and the role of religion in society following the French revolution and the Enlightenment.

The course will also explore communal identity and segregation policies, political practices of forced conversions, power dynamics between minorities and majorities, and the socio-political function of historical narratives and tropes. The module will also offer students a chance to learn about contemporary issues by exploring Antisemitism and Islamophobia, the UK Government's policies around migration, equality and security and the challenges of measuring the effectiveness of interfaith practice.

Sample teaching schedule

- Introduction to relations between religion and society
- Decolonisation, agenda, bias
- The medieval Middle East through the lens of the Cairo Genizah
- Britain and France
- Religious law and society
- Music as a medium of interfaith dialogue
- Antisemitism and Islamophobia
- British policy since 1948: from Windrush to Prevent
- Measuring the effectiveness of interfaith dialogue

Participants will also have the opportunity to take in some of the local experiences from punting on the River Cam to visiting the Fitzwilliam Museum and attending a traditional Friday night Sabbath meal.

For further details of the curriculum, contact Dr Esther-Miriam Wagner emw36@cam.ac.uk

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