

Generic job description and selection criteria

Job title	Research Associate: “Religion, Identity and Migration in the Global Middle East, 1850-1940” (The <i>Moving Stories</i> Project)
Department	Faculty of History
Division	Humanities
Location	Faculty of History, George Street, Oxford OX1 2RL
Grade and salary	Grade 7 spine point 1-3: £36,024 - £38,205 per annum
Start date	1 st September 2024 or as soon as possible thereafter
Hours	Full time
Contract type	Fixed term of 24 months from start date or 30/09/2026 whichever comes first (limited by external funding)
Method of application	Electronic (see ‘How to Apply’ below)
Application deadline	Noon on 29/07/2024
Number of referees required	Two references (please note that reference letters will only be requested at the shortlisting stage)
Vacancy reference	173854
Recruitment contact	recruitments@history.ox.ac.uk

Job description

Overview of the role

Applications are invited for the position of Research Associate on the ERC-funded project ‘Moving Stories: Sectarianisms in the Global Middle East’. Reporting to the Principal Investigator, Professor John-Paul Ghobrial, the post holder will be a member of a research project based at Oxford, and they will work independently to carry out research for a discrete area of the project. **Two** researchers are being sought to conduct research in any of the main areas of the project’s research as described below.

Whilst we welcome applications from candidates working in any field of Ottoman and Middle Eastern history, we are especially interested in applications from scholars who will be able to make a contribution to the project’s research in the following fields: gender and women’s history; studies of Arab migration and/or diaspora communities living in the *mahjar*; family history; the history of record-keeping and archives; and modern Arabic literature.

About the application process

Moving Stories is based at the Faculty of History at the University of Oxford. The team currently includes a Project Administrator and five full-time researchers, each focusing on a particular aspect within the scope of the work. We are now recruiting **two** further members of the research team which, from September 2024, will comprise a total of six members of the team, led by Professor John-Paul Ghobrial.

In preparing your application, you should read the *Further Particulars* and pay special attention to the *Appendix* below which provides background information on the project and its objectives. We are looking for candidates who can make a tangible and specific contribution to the project in terms of individually-authored publications as well as contributions to collective publications of the research team. In addition to contributions made to publications, Research Associates will be encouraged to conduct research trips and organize workshops in line with the project objectives, for which project funding will be made available as necessary.

About the project and the role

This project is called ***Moving Stories – Sectarianisms in the Global Middle East***. It is funded by the ERC under the Horizon 2020 programme and runs until 30th September 2026. It aims to explore a number of new approaches in the examination of this topic.

Background to the project

The late Ottoman period witnessed some extraordinary and lasting breaks with the past. Some were physical migrations, with hundreds of thousands of people relocating from the Middle East to discover and embrace new worlds in North and South America, Europe and Australia. Others travelled to South Asia and West Africa, flitting within and between the imperial domains of the Ottoman Empire, France and the United Kingdom. Small-scale traders, intellectuals seeking new horizons, embattled minorities: many of them setting out to reinvent themselves and discard inherited world views. Some of the most profound changes were internal, as Middle Eastern societies experienced an often turbulent evolution of both personal and collective identities, in religion, political thought, artistic expression and philosophy. For a remarkable period between 1860 and 1930, individuals from Cairo and Damascus to Smyrna and Beirut – as well as those in a global diaspora that spread from Marseille to Calgary and Boston to Buenos Aires – were faced with opportunities and challenges that resulted in true generational change, in both self-perception and the perception of outsiders.

Relationships between and among the region's religious groups were a key part of this complex picture, as evolving forms of sectarian identity – encompassing issues of religion, community, law and politics – became both a powerful force in the volatile history of a decolonising Middle East and an important factor in community development in the New World context. For some, violence was, during this fin-de-siècle period, a powerful force: experienced through episodes of widespread killing and displacement, and leading to the establishment of sizeable Eastern Christian communities across America. But for others, new forms of belonging offered the foundation stones of new relationships between, for example, Maronites and Orthodox Christians in the tenements of Lower Manhattan or Muslims and Christians in the neighborhoods of Sao Paulo.

This generational mobility did not happen in a vacuum: it took place within the purview of an Ottoman imperial power that, while fading, still had reach: to manage that mobility by withholding or granting travel documentation and to maintain some oversight over émigrés by placing consular representatives at the heart of overseas communities. Within the Ottoman Empire, too, migration occurred: a migration of status – as minorities pinned in place by old labels achieved social and political equality, their identities and rights formally validated and the perception of their communities

reformed – and a movement away from a presumption of state authority over sectarian and community inter-relationships.

As new identities were formed, the results of these generational shifts were far-reaching. In the new worlds of the diaspora, the post-migration generation was focused for the large part on assimilation rather than return. Early battles with racism and sectarian prejudices articulated scarcely more subtly by host communities were rapidly forgotten as Syrians, Turks and Arabs became, simply, Canadian, French and Brazilians. Education played a key part, accelerating the desuetude of the Arabic language, active religious practice and many of the cultural norms that suddenly seemed to belong in another place, another time.

Within this context, the Moving Stories project concentrates on two areas of research. First, the project will explore the global circulation of Middle Eastern sectarianism and the variety of sectarianisms that developed in specific localities across the Middle East, the Americas, and Europe. Second, the project will focus on what it calls the ‘moving stories’, or emotive forms of storytelling, used by individuals to describe, explain, and represent sectarianism as much to themselves as to multiple publics in local, national, and international contexts.

Further details about the project including the key Research Questions Q(1) to Q(5) and the four Project Objectives can be found below in the Appendix. Please read them carefully before preparing your application.

About the role:

Research Associate in “Religion, Identity and Migration in the Global Middle East, 1850-1940”

Middle Eastern migration was a phenomenon with global horizons, but it was also a reality that was experienced locally in different ways at the level of individual lives. This role provides early career researchers with an opportunity to conduct and publish groundbreaking research as part of a larger research team based at Oxford.

The responsibilities of the Research Associate fall under three main areas:

1. In consultation with the PI, the Research Associate will devise a feasible, specific project that will lead to the publication of a set of articles and/or a monograph related to the general objectives of the Moving Stories Project.
2. The Research Associate will contribute to the team’s collective work of preparation and publication of the project *Sourcebook*, which is described in the Appendix below. This will involve the preparation of specific entries on sources as well as the chance to contribute an individually-authored essay to the book’s introduction.
3. The Research Associate will collaborate with other members of the team, particularly in the review and analysis of Arabic sources, for inclusion in project publications.

Research Topics

Within the framework of the Moving Stories project, we are interested in applications from scholars working in any areas likely to advance the project’s research towards its main objectives as described in the Appendix.

Examples of areas the project has identified as particularly relevant include the following:

- *Gender and women’s history.* Especially productive topics for research could include: the role of specific women in the circulation and representation of sectarianism; women’s writings on ideas of belonging; gender and women’s history in the context of migration and diaspora; a case study

of a particular woman, family, or community through the prism of gender; the ways in which different generations – young and old – reflected on belonging; and the ways in which sectarian identities interacted with other forms of identity including tribal affiliation, confessional identity, and geographic place of origin.

- *Microhistories of belonging* built around the study of specific individuals, communities, institutions or localities that permit an analysis of belonging on multiple scales of analysis. These could be located in the Ottoman Empire, the Middle East, or the *mahjar* (e.g. New York, Buenos Aires, Sao Paolo and so on). Potential topics include particular philanthropic, civic institutions, or individuals, for example the British Syrian Relief Fund, the United Maronite Society, and/or major writers such as Ameen Rihani and Asad Rustum; and specific events of sectarian mobilization and the audiences that developed around them, for example the 1840 blood libel in Damascus, the massacre of Christians in Syria in the 1860s, the Coptic Congress 1911, the European Congress of Muslims in 1935, and the debates about sectarianism that circulated in print to multiple publics.
- *Literature, belief and belonging*. This area of research includes the study of Arabic or Arab-American literary works, contemporary documents, and forms of record-keeping about sectarianism, religious identity, and belonging. Potentially relevant topics include anything that reveals the view of sectarianism obtained in a range of first-hand sources including autobiographies, correspondence, diaries, poetry, memoirs, and other ego-documents; the memory and commemoration of sectarianism; and the literary representations and uses of sectarianism in the Arab *mahjar*.
- *Sectarianism, Scholarship, and the Nahda* . Potential topics of interest include the sectarian identity of various journals and the competition that existed between these journals; the study of the circle of Catholic scholars based around *al-Machriq* such as Louis Cheikho, Paul Sbath, Antoine Rabbath, and others; the interaction between sectarianism and history-writing in Arabic; the variety of intellectual publics that developed around works of Arabic scholarship; and the relationship between scholarship in Arabic produced in the Middle East and other traditions of scholarship produced in contexts of migration and their respective academic institutions. Of particular importance will be scientific periodicals, histories, and editions of manuscripts published in this period.

Research Skills

The research can be completed by postdoctoral RAs with research experience and a good knowledge of Arabic and, where applicable, Western languages (e.g., English, Spanish, French, or Portuguese). An ability to read Ottoman Turkish would also enable the RAs to engage with Ottoman archives and material relating to Ottoman consulates in the Americas. Candidates are encouraged to present detail of all relevant skills in their application.

Responsibilities/duties

- Produce a single-authored study (e.g., monograph, articles, etc.) on some central aspects of the project's research questions under the direction of the Principal Investigator.
- Collaborate in the preparation of research publications, book chapters, and source descriptions, especially towards the publication of the Project's *Sourcebook*.
- Undertake comprehensive and systematic literature reviews and reviews of primary sources as needed by the project objectives.
- Manage own academic research and administrative activities. This involves small scale project management, to co-ordinate multiple aspects of work to meet deadlines
- Analyse qualitative and/or quantitative data from a variety of sources, reviewing and refining theories as appropriate
- Contribute ideas for new research projects, and develop ideas for generating research income through suggestions for future research from the outputs of this project.
- Present papers at conferences or public meetings
- Represent the research project at external meetings/seminars
- Carry out collaborative projects with colleagues in the research team and, where opportunities are identified, at other institutions.

Practical information

We expect to hold interviews in early August Overseas candidates shortlisted will be offered an interview on Microsoft Teams. The interview panel will require submission of a piece of published or unpublished research, such as an article or dissertation chapter, from your existing portfolio as a sample of your work. Full details on deadlines and how to send it in will be supplied at that time.

For an informal discussion about this opportunity or if you have any questions, please contact Professor John-Paul Ghobrial at john-paul.ghobrial@history.ox.ac.uk. All practical and procedural queries should be sent to our recruitments team: recruitments@history.ox.ac.uk. All enquiries will be treated in strict confidence; they will not form part of the selection decision.

The position is based at the History Faculty and the expectation is that the candidate will be able to participate in the academic life of Oxford and enjoy the benefits of team working on this project. The university follows a flexible working policy and blended working will be considered.

Selection criteria

Applications will be judged only against the criteria which are set out below. You should make sure that your application shows very clearly how closely your skills and experience meet these criteria. We are committed to fairness, consistency, and transparency in selection decisions. Chairs of selection committees will be aware of the principles of equality of opportunity and fair selection, and there will be both female and male members of the selection committee. **Selection committees will explicitly take into account any career breaks or other factors, such as part-time working or disability, which may have had an impact on the quantity of candidates' publications.**

Essential

- Hold a relevant PhD/DPhil, or evidence that a doctorate is close to completion, together with relevant experience
- Possess sufficient specialist and linguistic knowledge in the discipline to contribute research to the main questions of the project, in particular written Arabic, which may be tested at interview
- Possess sufficient historical and disciplinary knowledge to contribute relevant individually-authored publications in line with the project objectives
- Previous experience of contributing to publications/presentations
- Ability to contribute ideas for new research projects and research income generation through suggestions for future research from the outputs of this project.
- Excellent communication skills, including the ability to write for publication, present research proposals and results, and represent the research network at meetings

Desirable

- Experience of independently managing a discrete area of a research project
- Experience of actively collaborating in the development of research articles for publication
- Knowledge of one or more relevant fields (e.g. Ottoman or Middle Eastern history, migration studies, literary studies, global history)
- Experience working in archives and collections of sources relevant to the project's research area
- Experience of public engagement around historical research
- Ability to use Ottoman Turkish and/or other relevant languages according to research needs, such as French, Spanish, Portuguese, or other Western languages.

How to apply

Applications are made through our online recruitment portal. Information about how to apply is available on our Jobs website <https://www.jobs.ox.ac.uk/how-to-apply>.

Your application will be judged solely on the basis of how you demonstrate that you meet the selection criteria stated in the job description.

As part of your application you will be asked to provide details of two referees and indicate whether we can contact them now.

Please upload the following materials in this format:

1. The **Cover Letter** must explain how you meet each of the selection criteria for the post using examples of your skills and experience. This should be **no more than 2 sides of A4**, and it may include experience gained in employment, education, or during career breaks (such as time out to care for dependents).
2. **Curriculum vitae**, including a list of publications.
3. Additionally, please provide a **Statement of Proposed Research** detailing the specific topic, research, and publication(s) you propose to complete as part of your work for the project. This should be **no more than one page of A4**, and it should make explicit reference to which Research Questions and Project Objectives will be addressed by this research.

Please upload all documents as **PDF files** with your name and the document type in the filename.

All applications must be received by **midday** UK time on the closing date stated in the online advertisement.

Information for priority candidates

A priority candidate is a University employee who is seeking redeployment because they have been advised that they are at risk of redundancy, or on grounds of ill-health/disability. Priority candidates are issued with a redeployment letter by their employing department(s).

If you are a priority candidate, please ensure that you attach your redeployment letter to your application (or email it to the contact address on the advert if the application form used for the vacancy does not allow attachments).

If you need help

Application FAQs, including technical troubleshooting advice is available at:
<https://staff.web.ox.ac.uk/recruitment-support-faqs>

Non-technical questions about this job should be addressed to the recruiting department directly
recruitment.support@admin.ox.ac.uk.

To return to the online application at any stage, please go to: www.recruit.ox.ac.uk.

Please note that you will receive an automated email from our online recruitment portal to confirm receipt of your application. **Please check your spam/junk mail** if you do not receive this email.

Important information for candidates

Data Privacy

Please note that any personal data submitted to the University as part of the job application process will be processed in accordance with the GDPR and related UK data protection legislation. For further information, please see the University's Privacy Notice for Job Applicants at:

<https://compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/job-applicant-privacy-policy>. The University's Policy on Data Protection is available at: <https://compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/data-protection-policy>.

The University's policy on retirement

The University operates an Employer Justified Retirement Age (EJRA) for very senior research posts at **grade RSIV/D35 and clinical equivalents E62 and E82** of 30 September before the 70th birthday. The justification for this is explained at: <https://hr.admin.ox.ac.uk/the-ejra>.

For **existing** employees on these grades, any employment beyond the retirement age is subject to approval through the procedures: <https://hr.admin.ox.ac.uk/the-ejra>.

There is no normal or fixed age at which staff in posts at other grades have to retire. Staff at these grades may elect to retire in accordance with the rules of the applicable pension scheme, as may be amended from time to time.

Equality of opportunity

Entry into employment with the University and progression within employment will be determined only by personal merit and the application of criteria which are related to the duties of each particular post and the relevant salary structure. In all cases, ability to perform the job will be the primary consideration. No applicant or member of staff shall be discriminated against because of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation.

Benefits of working at the University

Employee benefits

University employees enjoy 38 days' paid holiday, generous pension schemes, travel discounts, and a variety of professional development opportunities. Our range of other employee benefits and discounts also includes free entry to the Botanic Gardens and University colleges, and discounts at University museums. See <https://hr.admin.ox.ac.uk/staff-benefits>

University Club and sports facilities

Membership of the University Club is free for all University staff. The University Club offers social, sporting, and hospitality facilities. Staff can also use the University Sports Centre on Iffley Road at discounted rates, including a fitness centre, powerlifting room, and swimming pool. See www.club.ox.ac.uk and <https://www.sport.ox.ac.uk/>.

Information for staff new to Oxford

If you are relocating to Oxfordshire from overseas or elsewhere in the UK, the University's Welcome Service website includes practical information about settling in the area, including advice on relocation, accommodation, and local schools. See <https://welcome.ox.ac.uk/>

There is also a visa loan scheme to cover the costs of UK visa applications for staff and their dependants. See <https://staffimmigration.admin.ox.ac.uk/visa-loan-scheme>

Family-friendly benefits

With one of the most generous family leave schemes in the Higher Education sector, and a range of flexible working options, Oxford aims to be a family-friendly employer. We also subscribe to the Work+Family Space, a service that provides practical advice and support for employees who have caring responsibilities. The service offers a free telephone advice line, and the ability to book emergency back-up care for children, adult dependents and elderly relatives. See <https://hr.admin.ox.ac.uk/my-family-care>

The University has excellent childcare services, including five University nurseries as well as University-supported places at many other private nurseries.

For full details, including how to apply and the costs, see <https://childcare.admin.ox.ac.uk/>

Disabled staff

We are committed to supporting members of staff with disabilities or long-term health conditions. For further details, including information about how to make contact, in confidence, with the University's Staff Disability Advisor, see <https://edu.admin.ox.ac.uk/disability-support>

Staff networks

The University has a number of staff networks including the Oxford Research Staff Society, BME staff network, LGBT+ staff network and a disabled staff network. You can find more information at <https://edu.admin.ox.ac.uk/networks>

The University of Oxford Newcomers' Club

The University of Oxford Newcomers' Club is an organisation run by volunteers that aims to assist the partners of new staff settle into Oxford, and provides them with an opportunity to meet people and make connections in the local area. See www.newcomers.ox.ac.uk.

Oxford Research Staff Society (OxRSS)

A society run by and for Oxford University research staff. It offers researchers a range of social and professional networking opportunities. Membership is free, and all researchers employed by Oxford University are welcome to join. Subscribe at researchstaff-subscribe@maillist.ox.ac.uk to join the mailing list to find out about upcoming events and other information for researchers, or contact the committee on committee@oxrss.ox.ac.uk. For more information, see www.ox.ac.uk/oxrss, Twitter @ResStaffOxford, and Facebook www.facebook.com/oxrss.

APPENDIX:

FURTHER BACKGROUND ON THE MOVING STORIES PROJECT

Extended abstract about the project, methodology, and objectives

Aims of the Project: Globalizing and Historicizing Middle Eastern Sectarianism

The global history of sectarianism has long been neglected. This is because no project has endeavoured to connect the writings, experiences, and lives of Middle Eastern communities into a single analytical framework. Instead, the existing scholarship is fragmented and divided along linguistic, disciplinary, and scholarly lines. As a result, even the most basic questions have yet to be answered. In what ways did sectarianism express itself, or not as the case may be, in the diverse localities of the globalizing Middle East? Why did some individuals reject sectarian practices, ideas, and aspirations, while others took refuge in confessional identities even when they found themselves far from their places of origin in the Middle East? What forms of oral, written, and visual storytelling represented sectarianism, and who were the multiple publics that developed around these narratives? These are questions that naturally raise a set of wider issues at the intersection of social, political, intellectual, and even literary history.

Answering these questions requires a global approach to the study of sectarianism, one that takes seriously the transformations wrought by migration, globalization, and the circulation of literature in this period. In adopting such a framework, the *Moving Stories* project seeks to answer a fundamental question about the meaning, scale, and variety of sectarianism, that is, was there a core set of processes that united the diverse sectarianisms that developed in the Global Middle East?

The Project's Methodology and the Sourcebook

The project will be the first to adopt a global approach to the study of sectarianism, one that combines the study of sources from the Middle East, the Americas, and Europe. Where scholars working on sectarian discourse have long focused on a small circle of political and ideological works published in Arabic by reformist thinkers in the Middle East, the *Moving Stories* project will assemble a range of sources drawn from the multiple contexts of the everyday lives of communities stretching from the Ottoman Empire to the Americas. These sources include: Arabic printed periodicals and newspapers; first-person narratives such as letters, diaries, and autobiographies; novels, essays, and creative works written by Arab-American immigrants; oral histories; and the understudied records of the civic, cultural, political and religious institutions established by Middle Eastern Christians and Muslims.

The project will bring these sources together in a single analytical framework, and it will use a defined set of criteria to identify those that are most relevant to our analysis. From a selection of these archival, documentary, and literary sources, the project will also publish a *Sourcebook* entitled *The Archives of Sectarianism in the Global Middle East*, which will model the methodological approach of the project for use by scholars working on sectarianism in other contexts. The *Sourcebook* will make available to students, researchers, and scholars a collection of new sources for future research in Middle Eastern history.

Research Questions

The identification of these sources, however, is not a goal in itself; rather the research team will use these sources to write a global history of sectarianisms in the Middle East by publishing a series of monographs. To this end, there are five main questions that will drive forward the team's research: **(Q1)** In what ways did sectarianism express itself differently across the multiple localities in which Christians and Muslims from the Middle East came together?; **(Q2)** How did migration, globalization, and the circulation of information (especially print media) contribute to the interplay between local

sectarianisms in the Global Middle East?; **(Q3)** In what ways did individuals document, represent, and narrate sectarianism in this period, and what local, national, and international publics developed around stories of sectarianism?; **(Q4)** How did the lived experience of sectarianism vary across categories of gender, age, and class?; and finally **(Q5)** What role did political, academic, religious, cultural, and economic institutions play in the act of ‘sect-making’, and how did these roles change across time under various Ottoman, colonial, and national regimes?

Each of these questions opens up a wider set of issues. **(Q1)** focuses on models of sectarianism, and it seeks to identify a working typology of sectarian practices, cultures, and ideas in a way that reflects both global patterns and local expressions of sectarianism. In the way of anthropologists, therefore, the project explores the forms of ‘everyday sectarianism’ that existed in the social lives of Middle Eastern communities. **(Q2)** concentrates on wider macro issues related to the circulation, movement, and connectedness of sectarianism in the Global Middle East, as well as the ways in which it interacted with other forms of sectarian and non-sectarian mobilizations in the period, for example, humanitarianism, religious internationalism, and ecumenicalism. Under the category of **(Q3)**, the team will shift its attention from the macro to the micro by seeking to understand how individuals represented sectarianism to a variety of publics around them. Especially productive themes for analysis include the role of kinship and confessional identity in tales of migration; the depiction of sectarianism in the printed and visual media of the time; and the analysis of specific episodes or *causes célèbres* that attracted the interests of local, national and global publics. **(Q4)** looks specifically at how sectarianism was experienced differently across categories of gender, youth, and class, with particular interest in masculinity, child-rearing, and the gendered identities of sectarianism. Finally, **(Q5)** explores the role of politics, scholarship, economics, and civic institutions in the process of identity formation. Here, the project will study the mechanisms through which institutions fostered sectarianisms, and it will pay special attention to printing presses, women’s societies, factories and other sites of labour, cultural and religious brotherhoods, and political and charitable organisations. In doing so, **(Q5)** also explores how sectarianism connected the Ottoman, colonial, and national periods of Middle Eastern history.

Project Objectives

In sum, the project seeks to set a new agenda for the historical study of sectarianism, communalism, and religious difference in the Middle East, and beyond. It has four objectives:

- **OBJ 1:** First, it will identify, recover, and analyse a vast corpus of relevant sources in Middle Eastern (e.g., Arabic, Turkish, Syriac) and Western languages (e.g., English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian).
- **OBJ 2:** Second, it will use these sources to write the first global history of sectarianism in the Middle East. It will do so in a way that combines the study of the *circulation* of sectarianism with an *interpretation* of its expressions in different contexts.
- **OBJ 3:** The project’s third objective is to contribute a sophisticated methodology to the use of family papers and literary sources in Middle Eastern and global history.
- **OBJ 4:** Finally, the project will provide a model for understanding how other modern sectarianisms have developed through complex shifts in identity in which émigré and diaspora communities have often played a formative role. Looking beyond the Middle East, therefore, the project will open new avenues for further research into the comparative study of sectarianism among historians, social scientists, and literary scholars.

Project Publications and Outputs

The project will deliver a number of outputs including articles, events and a *Sourcebook*, provisionally entitled *Belief and Belonging across the Generations in the Global Middle East*. The five post-doctoral researchers based in Oxford will work across the Ottoman, American, and global contexts of

sectarianism. Their combined skills will enable the analysis of sources in the wide range of Middle Eastern (e.g., Arabic, Turkish, Syriac) and Western sources (e.g., English, Spanish, French, Portuguese and Italian).