JEWISH HISTORY: FROM BIBLICAL ISRAEL TO DIASPORA JEWS

Fall Semester, 2015

Tuesday, Thursday 9:00am -10:20am
Location: PAC002

Course Head:
Rachel L. Greenblatt
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Office telephone extension: 2372 (email is better than voice mail)

Office Hours:
Tuesdays 1:30 pm to 3:00 pm
Thursdays 10:30 am to 11:50 am
Or by appointment (including skype appointments during evening hours).

There will be no Tuesday office hours on September 15, 22, 29, Oct. 6.
No Thursday office hours Oct. 8.

Can we trace an “authentic” Jewish identity throughout history, as distinct from many “cultures” of Jews in the multitude of times and places in which they lived? This course provides an overview of the development of the major trends in Jewish civilization from biblical times through the early modern era (ending c. 1700) by exploring the lives of Jewish men and women, along with expressions of their ideas and practices, in a few of the major Jewish settlements throughout history. At its core, the course asks: is it even possible to define “Jewish” culture independently of that of other cultural traditions in whose midst it developed at different points of history? How do we integrate a respect for the autonomy and internal development of Jewish traditions while at the same time understanding that Jews constantly defined that culture in relation to their wider geo-political and cultural surroundings—be it through adoption, adaptation, or opposition to those concurrent trends?

Jewish culture has evolved both within and across cultural boundaries, and participants in the course will explore the development of a distinctively Jewish canon within many of the different cultural contexts in which Jews lived.

To do so, we will devote attention to close readings of traditional Jewish sources on the one hand and contextual understandings of Jews and Judaism within various non-Jewish historical and cultural surroundings on the other. The course is built on a series of seven units, each of which consists of three main parts. The units are arranged roughly
chronologically, with some attention to different geographic foci, beginning with the period of the Hebrew Bible, through later Antiquity and the Middle Ages, ending with Early Modern Europe. The first section of each unit, usually one class period, called “Intro,” is dedicated to a general outline of the geo-political and cultural history of the time period and area covered. This introduction is meant to provide a general historical background that will enable you to engage intelligently with the material to be presented in the following two class meetings. The second part of each unit (also usually one class period), “Text,” is devoted to close reading of a primary text from the period concerned, in translation. Many, but not all, of these texts are drawn from the canonical corpus of rabbinic Judaism: Bible, Mishna, Talmud, medieval exegesis, and so on. The preparation and presentation of this source material will rely heavily on a traditional Jewish pedagogical strategy little utilized in the academy, at least in the humanities: close reading by pairs of students studying a text together (“hevruta”). The third part (usually one class period) of each unit, “Cultures,” focuses on the relationship of Jews and Judaism in the period under discussion to their immediate cultural surroundings. We strive to place the text studied in the second part in a much broader cultural context in this third part.

Please note that this course will not treat modern Judaism at all.

Student Responsibilities. Students are expected to attend class regularly and to complete the following requirements. Percentages for each give a general idea of how grades will be calculated, but improvement over the course of the semester may also be figured in. Late papers will be graded down 1/3 grade per unexcused day late. In general, papers are assignments are graded on a point scale. An assignment with 15% of the course grade is given a mark from 1 to 15. This eases calculation of the final grade.

*Participation in class and in web site discussions. In order to foster better live, face-to-face discussions in class, each student must post a response to “the questions for thought” posted on the web site for each unit by the night prior to the "Cultures" meeting of that unit. For example, by Monday, September 21 at 9:00 p.m, you should post a response to the first unit's readings. Students may skip the online response without penalty for one unit of the student’s choice. Attendance at lectures will also be figured into the participation grade. 25%

*Two papers (approximately 3-5 pages each). Topics will be distributed. A rough draft or thesis statement and outline of each paper will be due approximately two weeks before the due date for each paper, and will be returned to students at least one week prior to the due date. Due October 13 (10%), Dec. 8 (20%)

*Midterm: October 22 - 20%

*Final exam: Date TBA - 25%
Grading scale:

- A+: 98–100
- A: 93 – 97
- A-: 90 – 93
- B+: 88 – 90
- B: 83 – 88
- B-: 80 – 83
- C+: 78 – 80
- And so on.

Special Needs and Accommodations. The class as a whole benefits from the inclusion of a diverse group of students, including all types of learners. If you anticipate requesting accommodations of any kind for assignments or exams, please be in touch with the instructor during the first two weeks of class.

Required Texts. Class readings will come from books available for purchase from the Coop or on reserve. Occasionally, additional reading material will be distributed in print or on the course web site.

- Biale, David, ed. *Cultures of the Jews*, vols. 1 & 2. (This book consists of 3 volumes and is available in 3 separate paperback volumes, or in a single, one-volume version).
- Holtz, Barry W., ed. *Back to the Sources*.

Recommended Texts. In addition, the following texts provide useful background for topics covered in class. All of them should be on reserve at Olin.

- Baskin, Judith, ed. *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*. 2nd ed.
- *Jewish Study Bible*, ed. Brettler & Berlin
- Ben-Sasson, Haim Hillel, ed. *A History of the Jewish People*.
- Brettler, Marc. *How to Read the Bible*.
- Cohen, Mark. *Under Crescent and Cross*.
- Cohen, Shaye. *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*.

Collaboration Policy:

Discussion and the exchange of ideas are essential to academic work. For assignments in this course, you are encouraged to consult with your classmates on the choice of paper topics and to share sources. You may find it useful to discuss your chosen topic with your peers, particularly if you are working on the same topic as a classmate. However, you should ensure that any written work you submit for evaluation is the result of your own research and writing and that it reflects your own approach to the topic. You must also adhere to standard citation practices in this discipline and properly cite any books, articles, websites, lectures, etc. that have helped you with your work.

If you would like to collaborate with a classmate, in groups of no more than 3, on any written assignment that is NOT an exam (mid-term or final), please contact the Professor or TF. One paper will be submitted by all the participants together, and one grade will be assigned. **Collaboration of this type requires prior authorization of the instructor.**
Course outline

Because of the way holidays on the Jewish calendar fall out this year, I will have to reschedule three different Tuesday class meetings (see below for dates). Three to four additional dates will be scheduled, accommodating as many students’ scheduling constraints as possible. At least one will be a regular make-up class, one a library meeting, and one a special opportunity to view some items held by Wesleyan collections that have direct relevance to our course topics. Because the make-up class, in particular, has yet to be schedule, the outline below is subject to change.

In addition, specific dates and assignments are subject to change due to unforeseen circumstances. If you miss a class, please be in touch with a classmate or with the instructor to double-check assignments for the following class meeting.

Introduction. Tues., Sept. 8

1. Biblical Beginnings (c. 2000 BCE to 586 BCE)

   1 INTRO/TEXT. Thurs., Sept. 10 Torah as Origin Myth
   Genesis 12-41
   Exodus 1-15
   Recommended: Marc Brettler, How to Read the Bible, 1-47

   Tuesday, Sept. 15: NO CLASS (Rosh Hashanah)

   1 INTRO, cont. Thurs. Sept. 17 Biblical History
   Scheindlin 1-23. You may also wish to read up to p. 164 or so for a historical overview of the topics to be covered throughout the entire course.
   Barnavi 2-27

   1 CULTURES. Tues. Sept. 22 Israel in the Ancient Near East
   Biale I, 42-75 (Hendel). In the 1-volume version, 42-75
   Recommended: Biale, I, 9-42 (Pardes). In the 1-volume version, 9-42

   Topics distributed for 1st paper

2. Second Temple and Early Rabbinic Periods (c. 586 BCE to 200 CE)

   2 INTRO. Thurs. Sept. 24 Judeans to Jews
   Barnavi, 28-53, 56-57, 60-63
   Scheindlin, 25-49
   Recommended: Baskin, 46-73 (Kraemer)

   Tuesday, Sept. 29: NO CLASS (Sukkot)
2 TEXT. Thurs. Oct 1. Oral Traditions, in Writing  
Holtz, 129-134  
Mishna: Berachot, ch. 1

DUE: Draft and thesis statement OR outline of 1st paper, due electronically by 9 am

Tuesday, Oct. 6: NO CLASS (Simchat Torah)

2 CULTURES. Thurs. Oct. 8 Greece and Rome in Jerusalem  
Biale I, 139-179 (Myers) In the 1-volume version, 135-179

3. Jews and Early Christians: Rome to Byzantium (c. 63 BCE to 638 CE)

3 INTRO. Tues. Oct 13. Judea and Beyond after the Destruction  
Barnavi, 54-55, 58-59, 66-71  
Scheindlin, 51-69  
Holtz, 177-211 (Midrash)

DUE: PAPER 1, due electronically by 9 am

3 TEXT. Thurs. Oct. 15 Re-telling the Exodus  
Passover Haggadah, selections

3 CULTURES. Tues. Oct. 20 “Sister” Religions  
Biale I, 180-221 (Irshai) In the 1-volume version, 181-221  
Israel Yuval, Two Nations in Your Womb, 56-

Thurs, Oct. 22 (MID-TERM EXAM)

Tuesday, Oct. 27: NO CLASS (Fall Break)

4. Babylonia (focus on c. 200 to 1000 CE)

4 INTRO. Tues. Nov. 3. Rabbinic Judaism in Babylon  
Barnavi, 54-55, 58-59, 66-71  
Scheindlin, 51-69  
Holtz, 177-211 (Midrash)
4 TEXT. Thurs. Nov. 5. Reading the Talmud  
Babylonian Talmud, selections

4 CULTURES. Tues. Nov. 10. Rabbinic Jews in Zoroastrian Context  
Biale I, 223-265 (Gafni) In the 1-volume version, 223-265

Topics distributed for Paper 2

5. Jews and Islam: Arabia to Spain (c. 638 to 1100 CE)

Barnavi, 74-77, 80-97, 100-103  
Scheindlin, 71-95.  
Isadore Twersky, A Maimonides Reader, 1-29  
Recommended: Baskin, 128-149 (Levine Melammed)

5 TEXT. Tues. Nov. 17  
Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, selections

5 CULTURES. Thurs. Nov. 19. Aspects of Jewish-Muslim Symbiosis  
Biale II, 11-84 (Scheindlin) In the 1-volume version, 313-386  
Recommended: Biale I, 267-302 (Firestone) In the 1-volume version, 267-302, and  
Biale II, 86-145 (Gampel)

DUE: THESIS STATEMENT AND OUTLINE OF PAPER 2

6. Medieval Ashkenaz (c. 900 to 1500 CE)

6 INTRO. Tues. Nov. 24. New Jewish Patterns North of the Alps  
Barnavi, 78-79, 98-99, 104-113  
Scheindlin, 97-121  
Holtz, 213-259 (Greenstein)

Thursday, Nov. 26: NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)

6 TEXT. Tues. Dec. 1. Jewish Text in Ashkenaz  
Rashi, medieval biblical commentators, selections

DUE: Rough draft of Paper 2 due electronically for anyone who wishes to receive instructor feedback before submitting the final version.

6 CULTURES. Thurs. Dec. 3. Jews and Christians as Neighbors  
Biale II, 147-214 (Marcus). In the 1-volume version, 449-516
7. Early Modern Europe (c. 1500 to 1750 CE)

7 INTRO. Tues. Dec. 8. Exile and Return
  Barnavi, 118-147
  Scheindlin, 123-140, 147-164
  Recommended: Baskin, 169-192 (Weissler)
  Glückel of Hameln, Written by Herself, trans. and ed. B, Abrahams, selections

DUE: Paper 2 due electronically

7 TEXT. Thurs. Dec. 10. Print and the ”Globalization” of Jewish Law
  Karo’s Shulhan Arukh & Isserles’ Mapa, selections

7 CULTURES. [Make-up date] Openness and Insularity
  Biale II, 217-268 (Rosman), 337-367 (Kaplan)
  In the 1-volume version, 519-570, 639-669


8. Transition to Modernity, Review & Conclusions

  Wed., [Make-up date]. Attacks on Tradition; Modern Implications, Conclusions, Review
  Readings to be announced

FINAL EXAM: To Be Announced