WOMEN AND GENDER IN JEWISH SOCIETY, ANTIQUITY TO MODERNITY

Jewish Studies / History 237      Tues., Th. 1-2:15      King 327

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Office hours: Tu and Th, 2:30-3:30, self sign-up, sheets on my door weekly; other times by appointment.
This course explores Jewish women’s history and the construction and workings of gendered behavior in women and men in Jewish societies from antiquity to the twentieth century in cultural (Sephardic, Ashkenazic, Middle Eastern), and chronological context. It studies "normative" constructions of women’s and men’s roles in law and custom, and compares these to social realities.

Topics include: gender and power relations in the family and society; women and religion; women’s economic and communal functions, literacy, feminism; the construction and expression of maleness in traditional and modernizing Jewish societies.

Sources include rabbinic texts; medieval communal ordinances, prenuptial and divorce documents; women’s letters, memoirs, and rituals; biography; memoir; sociological and anthropological studies; contemporary feminist writing.

Basic questions are: what was Jewish women’s historical experience, and how and why did this differ from that of men? How is "Jewish history" conceptualized differently when women’s experience is included? How does gender shape Jewish experience?

This course gives JWST, HIST, GSFS, CD, and Wr credit.

This syllabus contains information for which you are responsible; please see me with any questions. It is on the JWST and HIST websites, should you need another hard copy.

Course requirements:

A. Class participation:

1. Regular attendance, which will be noted. Students are responsible for obtaining notes, handouts, and/or announcements from other students for any missed classes. Please inform me if illness or emergency prevents you from attending class.

2. Thoughtful preparation of all assigned readings for the class for which they are assigned. There are 60-70 pages of reading (not including notes, illustrations), per class.

ALL assigned reading, INCLUDING material on eres and in the “Required for Purchase” list, is on SHELF reserve in Mudd. This is the default option for doing assigned reading.

Assigned reading in titles NOT on the “Required for Purchase” list is on ERES (check more than one way: author, editor, and/or title).

If you cannot locate reserve material, ASK RESERVE ROOM STAFF, preferably the Supervisor, Michael Palazzollo, right away. Emailing me is not an effective way to get help; all I can do is email such staff, with the delay. Do tell me about
any problem your efforts do not resolve; same for the Bookstore, re: the “Required for Purchase” list.
You are expected to have your own copies of books on the “Required for Purchase” list. If purchase poses an untenable financial burden, consider pairing with another student to purchase and share. You may also obtain readings through Ohio Link but plan sufficient time for material to arrive. You can also try the Hillel library, in Wilder. Copies of some readings may be available from the JWST office; see me.

However you do it, it is each student’s responsibility to obtain and prepare all assigned readings for the session for which they are assigned. There is no excused failure to obtain readings; if illness of any other circumstance prevents your doing readings but you are able to come to class, do so; see me.

**REQUIRED FOR PURCHASE:**

Rachel Biale, *Women in Jewish Law*

Avraham Grossman, *Pious and Rebellious, Jewish Women in Medieval Europe*

*The Memoirs of Gluckel of Hameln*, Translated by Marvin Lowenthal

Marion Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class*

Susan Sered, *Women as Ritual Experts*

Should class be cancelled for any reason, prepare the session’s reading as usual—stay current with the calendar and syllabus; we’ll work out discussion.

3. **Active, informed participation in class.** Class will be mix of lecture and student-generated discussion, which is a crucial for your grade and for the learning of all. If you are having trouble entering discussion, see me.

4. **One-page observation/ analysis papers on assigned readings for each class.** These will not be graded but your consistency in submitting them and their overall quality count toward the final grade. These are to be informed observations, not reports on the readings or simply reactions to them. Note main themes raised in, and by, the readings. What struck you; why? What did you find important, surprising, contradictory; related to other readings? What have you learned? The writing here need not be polished and can be in outline form as long as it is coherent and substantive. Typed preferred but legible handwritten OK. Use your observations in class; hand them in to me at the end; no late submissions. Make sure YOUR NAME, DATE / CLASS SESSION and signed HONOR CODE declaration is on each.

5. **One or more (depending on class size) 7-10 (enforced) minute lead-off presentations on a few major themes for discussion.** Think of this as a more developed, spoken version of your observation paper: it is not to be a report on the readings or list of questions but informed, analytical points on a few major
issues. These minutes fly so pace yourself when you choose and prepare your points.

If there is no lead off presenter for a session, we will do a round table in which each student puts out points for discussion, using your prepared observations. On the day of your presentation, submit an outline of your points instead of the observation paper. I will solicit sign up for lead off presentations but it is each student’s responsibility to sign up and present when scheduled.

Bring assigned readings to class if they are on the Required for Purchase list (see below).

B. Written work:

1. Two short (6-7 double-spaced, typed pages) essay papers based on assigned readings and class discussions. Essays must be substantive, analytical, and coherent, using proper grammar and spelling; use Writing Guides, listed below. Essays must be submitted to me in hard copy only; due dates on the syllabus. Do not write formal notes or bibliography; use abbreviated citation in the body of your essay (e.g., Grossman, 85), when quoting, citing, or paraphrasing closely.

2. One 12-15 page (excluding notes, bibliography, illustrations) research paper on a topic of your choice, expanding on or related to one on the syllabus, in lieu of a final exam, due on the day/time set for the final by the Registrar. You must consult with me and get approval for your topic and bibliography before Spring break. The paper requires both formal foot or end notes and Bibliography, using established conventions, as laid out in any of the following guides:

WRITING GUIDES:

Mary Lynn Rampolla, A Pocket Guide to Writing in History
Jules Benjamin, A Student's Guide to History
Diana Hacker, A Pocket Style Manual

Do not exceed stated page limits for assignments. Unless you have obtained my consent in case of documented illness or emergency, late submission of essays results in 1/3 grade reduction per day of lateness (e.g., an A- paper becomes B+). Any extension on the final paper can come only as Incomplete processed through the Registrar.
There are no exams in this course.

All written work must be submitted in hard copy only, no electronic submissions. To be graded, all work MUST be: dated; stapled if more than one page—lost loose sheets not graded; paginated; have your name and a signed Honor Code declaration on it.

Writing for the essays and paper must be substantive, organized, analytical, clear, composed in grammatically correct English, and use correct spelling. Write simply, directly, concisely, and precisely. Avoid convoluted constructions;
passive tense; slang; inflated prose. Do not use "impact’ as a verb unless you mean "collision" (say: "influence," "affect"); “its” is the possessive; “it’s” is the contraction. History writing is a complex exercise; drafts and re-writes are essential, meaning allotting sufficient time to revise. Do make use of the writing tutors the College makes available and the writing guides listed above. I am happy to read drafts submitted two days ahead of a deadline.

HONOR CODE: All work for this course, as in all at Oberlin, is done under the terms of the College Honor Code, whose terms students are responsible to know. See the HC section on the College website, members of the Honor Code committee, reference librarians, me, with any questions.

GRADING:

Participation 45%: including observation papers; leadoff presentation/s: participation in discussions.

Written work: 55%: First essay: 10%; second essay 15%; final paper: 30%

If any circumstance affects your ability to fulfill course requirements in an ongoing way, please speak with me sooner than later. I will do my utmost to help but can only do so if you alert me to the need promptly.

Please note that class will not be held on 4/9 and 4/16 (Passover); session time to be used for assigned reading and written work; details on syllabus.
Women and Gender in Jewish Society: Antiquity to Modernity

1. Introductory  2/3

Writing women out of Jewish history, writing them in; male “normativity,” or, ‘Jews’ and ‘Jewesses’; gender and Jews

in class:

Sondra Henry and Emily Taitz, Written out of History; Our Jewish Foremothers

Genesis, chps. 1-3

2. Rethinking and Unthinking Assumptions; Women in "the Rabbinic Period"  2/5

Paula Hyman, "Gender and Jewish History," Tikkun, (Jan., 1988), pp.35-38

Shulamit Magnus, "'Out of the Ghetto': Integrating the Study of Jewish Women Into the Study of 'the Jews'," Judaism, 39 (Winter, 1990), pp. 28-36


3. Rabbinic Law and Women ("Woman")  2/10

Rachel Biale, Women and Jewish Law, chps.1-2, pp.10-69

* As the title of this book states, the subject is law. The author does an incredible job of clarifying things but be patient with the type of discourse and with yourself is this is new to you; bring any questions or needed clarifications to class; aim to get the gist of the reading.

Lead off:

4. Rabbinic Law, continued  2/12

Biale, chps.3-4, pp.70-120

Lead off:

5. Law, continued  2/17
Biale, chps.5-6, pp. 121-174

Lead off:

6. **Women and Rabbinic Law: Women's Experience and Agency**  2/19

Charlotte Fonrobert, "Yalta's Ruse: Resistance Against Rabbinic Menstrual Authority in Talmudic Literature";

Shaye Cohen, "Purity, Piety, and Polemic: Medieval Rabbinic Denunciations of 'Incorrect' Purification Practices"

both articles in: Rahel Wasserfall, *Women and Water*, pp.60-100


In class: tkhine, handout

Lead off:

7. **Jewish Marriage, Family, and Women: Under Medieval Islam**  2/24


Enjoy the glimpses into everyday life of average Jews; get the gist. How does social reality dovetail with, or differ from, the law we have studied?

Lead off:

8. **Under Medieval Islam, continued**  2/26

Goitein, chps. 14 selection, 15, pp. 385-423, 439-467

Remember: make an appointment to see me about your paper topic and preliminary bibliography before Fall break.

9. **Medieval Jewish Women: Europe**  3/3


Lead off:

10. **In Medieval Europe, continued**  3/5

Grossman, chps.6-8, pp.123-197
** FIRST ESSAY DUE MONDAY 3/9 SUBMIT TO MY OFFICE BY NOON

11. In Medieval Europe, continued 3/10

MAKE AN APPOINTMENT TO SEE ME ABOUT YOUR PAPER TOPIC, which must be approved BEFORE Spring Break; statement topic and preliminary Bibliography due upon return from Break.

Grossman, chps. 9-11, 13, pp.198-252, 273-281

12. Early Modernity: Glikl Hamel 3/12


The Memoirs of Glueckel of Hameln, Lowenthal ed., pp.1-108 easy, fast read but deceptively so: this is a very important historical source. As you read, note why.

We will read all of Glikl's memoirs. I have divided the reading over several sessions; read on as you wish but come prepared to discuss the pages assigned for each class.

Lead off:
13. Glikl, continued 3/17

The Memoirs, pp.108-239

Lead off:

14. Glikl, conclusion; Assessing the Significance of Her Writing 3/19

The Memoirs, pp.239-277

Natalie Zemon Davis, Women on the Margins, pp.5-63

Lead off:

SPRING BREAK 3/21-3/29 STATEMENT OF YOUR PAPER TOPIC AND PRELIMINARY BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE NEXT CLASS

15. Jewish Women and Radical Assimilation 3/31

STATEMENT OF PAPER TOPIC AND PRELIMINARY BIBLIOGRAPHY due today

Michael Meyer, Origins of the Modern Jew, chp.4, pp.85-114


Lead off:

**16. Modern Marriage and Family Patterns**  4/2

Marion Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class*, Introduction, chp. 1, pp.3-63

Lead off:

**17. Women and the Jewish Middle Class: Germany**  4/7

Kaplan, *Jewish Middle Class*, chps. 2-3, 5, pp.64-116, 137-152

Lead off:

NO CLASS 4/9 and 4/16 (Passover): use to work on SECOND ESSAY ASSIGNMENT. DUE MONDAY 4/20 by noon, and research paper and Bibliography

**18. Jewish Emancipation and Women's Emancipation in the Community: Germany**  4/14

Marion Kaplan, *The Jewish Feminist Movement in Germany*, chps. 3, 5, pp.59-102, 147-168

Lead off:

No class 4/16: use to work on your SECOND ESSAY ASSIGNMENT-- DUE MONDAY 4/20 BY NOON to my office-- and paper topic preparation

**19. Women's Religion: Eastern Europe**  4/21

REVISED PAPER TOPIC AND BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE IN CLASS TODAY

Chava Weissler, *Voices of the Matriarchs*, chps. 1, 3-5, pp.3-35, 51-85

Tracy Gurn Klirs, ed., *The Merit of Our Mothers*, pp.12-45, 112-118 (half these pages are in Yiddish)

Lead off:

**20. Women’s Religion: Middle East**  4/23
Susan Sered, *Women as Ritual Experts*, Introduction, chps.1, 2, 4, 5, pp.3-48, 65-102

Lead off:


Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct, The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man*, Introduction, chp. 1, pp.1-80 (heavier than usual p. assignment, but some are notes; less next time)

22. Modern Jewish Masculinity, continued  4/30

Boyarin, chps. 3-4, pp.127-185

23. Tradition and Assimilation: Eastern Europe  5/5

Paula Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation*, chp. 2, pp.50-92


Lead off:

24. Breaking the Mold: Rebelling; Creating Alternatives  5/7

Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Yentl, the Yeshiva Boy* see me re: additional copies
