Shulamit Magnus  

Oberlin College

Jewish Studies/ History 131

JEWISH HISTORY: FROM BIBLICAL ANTIQUITY TO SPANISH EXPULSION

Tu., Th. 11-12:15

Office: Rice 310 phone: 440-775-8529; 58866 (dept. office; Denise Karshner, AA)  
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Office hours: Wed. 10:00-12:00, 2-3:00, and by appointment

This course is an introduction to Jewish history from biblical antiquity through the medieval period in Christian and Islamic realms. No background is assumed or required.

Topics include: biblical society, religion, and literature; how biblical religion became Judaism; Hellenistic and Roman rule and Jewish politics to each; sects of the Second Temple period; rabbinic Judaism; women, gender relations, the family, and community; Jewish status and economic activities in medieval Muslim and Christian realms; medieval Jewish philosophy, mysticism, and schisms; Jew-hatred, persecutions, and expulsions: Jewish attitudes to non-Jews and responses to contempt and persecution.

REQUIREMENTS:

1. ATTENDANCE at class meetings is required and will be noted. It is the student's responsibility to obtain from other students any handouts, notes, assignments, or announcements if you miss a class. If any circumstance prevents your attendance or ability to do assignments in an ongoing way, please discuss this with me as soon as possible. I will do my best to be of help but can only do so if you alert me to the need.

READINGS: Come to class with the readings for that session prepared; I welcome and may solicit your informed questions and comments during class. Exams require thoughtful use of both readings and lectures. Do raise any questions or difficulties with readings in class and/or during office hours.

ALL required reading, except encyclopedia articles, is on shelf reserve in Mudd. Shelf reserve is the default option for doing required reading.

Required reading NOT in titles “Required for Purchase,” is also on electronic reserve, ERES (JWST 131). Be sure to check for readings in more than one way: by author, editor (if an
anthology), and/or title of article, or book. Refer any questions or problems with any reserve readings immediately to reserve room staff, preferably, the Supervisor. Unless you do so at least a week before you need to do the readings, emailing me about such a problem will not help (or excuse you from doing the reading); and all I can do is contact the reserve room staff, so best do that to begin with. IF YOU CAN’T LOCATE SOMETHING ON ERES, USE THE SHELF RESERVE COPY. Don’t wait for the last minute to locate (or do) assigned readings. Some printed copies of assigned readings may be available from the JWST office; speak to me.

Titles listed below as "Required for Purchase" are used heavily and have been ordered in the Bookstore; relying on shelf reserve for readings in these titles is not advisable. If you finances pose a problem, try pairing with other students to purchase and share the list. Ohio Link is another option but be sure to order well in advance.

There are about 60 pages of assigned reading per session, not including notes/ illustrations. Securing and doing the required reading for the date assigned is the responsibility of each student. There are no excused failures to OBTAIN readings. If you cannot DO the readings because of illness or emergency, see me

REQUIRED FOR PURCHASE:

Tanakh, The Holy Scriptures. The New JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text

Robert M. Seltzer, Jewish People, Jewish Thought *an absurdly expensive paperback (also required in JWST 132).

Jewish Women in Historical Perspective, ed. Judith Baskin

Susan Niditch, Ancient Israelite Religion

Jane Gerber, The Jews of Spain

Robert Chazan, Church, State, and Jew in the Middle Ages

Whenever reading is assigned from a primary text in a book you own (Bible, Seltzer, Chazan) or material you may have printed out from eres (Schiffman), please bring the text to class.

READING GUIDELINES:
When you finish a reading, stop and ask yourself what you have learned, what impressions you are left with; then ask yourself WHY what struck you did. What thesis is the author arguing? What evidence is there for the argument? What are the implications of the evidence, argument? Asking yourself these and similar types of questions help you focus on the significance of the reading, to the connection between details and the big picture.

ORAL AND WRITTEN WORK:

PRESENTATION: Each student will make a SHORT (5 minute, enforced) presentation on one session's readings, based on the kinds of questions outlined above (“Reading Guidelines”). Your job is not to report on the readings, or simply to state reactions to them, but to make insightful comments about 3-5 main points (remember, you have only 5 minutes) you drew from them. Do you see connections to, comparisons with, other material we've studied? What implications, conclusions can you state?

WRITE-UP: You must hand in a written version of your presentation, not to exceed 2 typed (not hand written, please), double-spaced pages, on the day of your presentation; make sure your name is on it. No late submissions of this assignment accepted. This oral and written presentation count for 10% of your grade. I will solicit everyone's leadoff choice but it is your responsibility to make sure you are signed up for a presentation.

ESSAY ASSIGNMENTS: There will be two take home essay assignments in lieu of a midterm, at roughly one-month intervals (see syllabus for due dates), and a final, in-class exam on the day and time set by the Registrar. I will hand out essay topics out at least one week in advance of the submission due date. Submit essays to me in class on the day they are due, hard copy only, no electronic submissions.

Unless you have obtained my consent in case of a documented emergency, lateness in submission of essays assignments will result in a third of a grade reduction per day (an A- becomes a B+, etc.). The final exam must be taken at the time set by the Registrar unless that office grants a substitute date; Instructors have no discretion about this. Requests for Incompletes must be processed with the Dean of Students.

All submitted written work MUST have: your name and a signed Honor Code declaration on it to be graded (College requirement). All writing MUST be typed, paginated, and stapled. Any work missing any of these elements will be returned ungraded.

WRITING GUIDELINES

Essays must be substantive (draw clearly from readings and class sessions), coherent, use correct grammar and spelling, and be self-sufficient: comprehensible to someone intelligent.
and interested, but with no independent knowledge of your topic (such a person—not I—should be your imagined reader). Make sure you have understood and are addressing the essay question! If you have any doubts about what is being asked, ask me! Avoid use of passive tense and complicated style; write simply, directly, concisely, and precisely. Common misuses: "impact" is not a transitive verb unless you mean "collide with" (as in asteroid); use "affect; "influence." "It's" is a contraction for "it is; "its" is possessive. Bibliography, footnotes, are not necessary and should not be used in the essays; use abbreviated citation in the body of your text, e.g., (Chazan, Church, p.62). Clear thinking and writing and solid argumentation based on evidence count heavily. I am happy to meet with you and read drafts if you submit these a few days in advance of expected comments. Do make use of Writing Tutors the College makes available. History essay writing is a complex skill. Drafts and re-writes-- meaning enough time to reflect on and revise your thinking and prose-- are essential.

Suggested books on writing:

Mary Lynn Rampolla, A Pocket Guide to Writing in History
William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White, The Elements of Style
Jules Benjamin, A Student's Guide to History

GRADING:
Oral presentation and its write-up: 10% of final grade
First essay assignment: 20%
Second essay assignment: 35%
Final exam: 35%

OPTIONAL:

IN ADDITION to required writing described above, students may choose to do a short (10-12 page) research paper on a topic from, or related to, the syllabus. This option gives students the opportunity for greater depth of study and an additional element for the final grade. You MUST obtain my consent for your topic; I strongly urge you to do this by return from Fall break. Bibliography and footnotes are required for the paper, using accepted scholarly conventions; follow Rampolla or Benjamin (see above) and see me.

If you choose the paper option, the course grade will be calculated as follows:
10%: presentation/ write-up; 20% for each essay assignment (total: 40%); 25% for the final; 25% for the paper.

HONOR CODE: This course, as all in Oberlin, operates under the Honor Code, including but not limited to, prohibition of plagiarism, using another’s work. All College students are
You are responsible for understanding and adhering to the Code, information about which is available on the College website, from the Honor Code committee, and from reference librarians in Mudd.

You are responsible for all the information on this syllabus; if you have any questions, see me. The syllabus is on the Jewish Studies and History websites. If you lose your hard copy, please make another from these sites.

S. Magnus JWST/ HIST 131

Jewish History: From Biblical Antiquity to Spanish Expulsion

1. INTRODUCTORY 9/5
What is "Jewish" history? Were Moses and Miriam “Jews”? How about Jesus?

Assumptions and biases in the study of Jewish history:

"B.C."/ "B.C.E."
"A.D."/ "C.E."
"Old Testament; "Hebrew Bible; “The Bible”
"Hebrews"/ "Israelites"/ "Jews"/ “non-Jews"

Assumptions and biases in the reading of texts:

How, according to the Bible, did creation of the world happen? What fruit did Adam and Eve eat?

2. THE BIBLE: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND; READING THE TEXT 9/7
Seltzer, pp.7-21, 43-46 and the chart before p.7.

Niditch, chp.1, pp.3-33; "Timeline" at the back of this book

Genesis, 1:1-11:32 (JPS Tanakh, pp. 1-17)

N.B.: for this and subsequent Biblical readings: the first number signifies chapter, followed by colon and verse number/s. If I list only the name of a biblical book and number/s, with no colon, the number refers to the chapter, all of which is to be read (e.g., Deuteronomy 15-17 means read all of chapters 15, 16 and 17). REMEMBER TO BRING THE TEXT TO CLASS!

Phyllis Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," in Elizabeth Koltun, ed., The
3. BIBLICAL RELIGION; FOUNDATIONAL MYTHS: ORIGINS, PATRIARCHS, MATRIARCHS, GOD 9/12

Susan Niditch, Ancient Israelite Religion, pp.34-69


N.B.: This is meant to be rapid reading to familiarize you with basic outlines of significant portions of text; to be distinguished from more focused reading of shorter selections. See how Niditch uses and interprets this material. Remember to bring your Hebrew Bibles to class.

4. FOUNDATIONAL MYTHS, CONTINUED: EGYPT; EXODUS; SINAI 9/14

Rapid reading:

5. LAW, COVENANT, RITUAL 9/19

Niditch, pp.70-121

Exodus, 18:13-27, 21-23

Leviticus, 18-20, 23-26

Deuteronomy, 5-6, 14:1-19:21

Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger, pp.41-57

Leviticus 5-9, 11-15, 17

Numbers 15, 28-29

6. CONQUEST (?) OF CANAAN; ISRAELITE KINGDOMS AND EMPIRE 9/21

Seltzer, pp.15-32

Norman Gottwald, The Hebrew Bible, A Socio-Literary Introduction, chp. 6, pp.261-280,
284-288 only

Niditch, pp.122-123 (timeline), 128-130 (maps)

Rapid readings:

Numbers 27:1-11


Joshua 1-7, 8-9

I Samuel 1:1-28, 3, 8-10, 14:47-48, 15-17

II Samuel 5:1-5

I Kings 1:1-40, 4-6:15

II Kings 21-25

7. GOD, SOCIETY, AND HISTORY; PROPHETIC JUSTICE 9/26

Seltzer, pp.34-39, 77-111, 119-126

Rapid readings:

Deut. 10:12-11:26, 28:1-69, 30:1-20

Isaiah 47-49, 51-52, 54, 60-62

Jeremiah 1-2, 5, 7, 25-29:5, 7

Ezekiel 5:5-17, 6-8, 11, 18, 37

Amos 5:21-25

Lamentations: 5

8. EXILE AND RETURN 9/28

Seltzer, pp.34-46, 112-119, 126-131
Lawrence Schiffman, From Text to Tradition, pp.33-56

Books of Ezra and Nehemiah (Hebrew Bible)

Lawrence Schiffman, Texts and Traditions, pp.97-103 (N.B. This and Schiffman’s other book, see 2 lines up, sound the same, but they aren’t… this one is documents. If you print the documents off eres or purchase this book—it’s a great source collection-- please bring this material to all classes for which it is assigned.)

9. SECOND COMMONWEALTH: CANONIZING "SCRIPTURE"; JEWS AND JUDAISM OF THE HELLENISTIC DIASPORA 10/3

FIRST ESSAY ASSIGNMENT DUE IN CLASS TODAY

Schiffman, From Text, pp.56-72

Seltzer, pp.171-177, see his chart, pp.166-170

Lawrence Schiffman, Texts and Traditions, pp.117-120, 130-134, 195-198, 211-220

10. HELLENISM AND JUDAISM: HELLENIZERS, MACCABBEES, JEWISH CULTURE WARS (or: "What is Hannukah?") 10/5

Victor Tcherikover, Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews, chps.4-6, pp.175-234

Schiffman, Texts, pp.136-138, 145-147, 151-163

11. JUDEA AND ROME; SECOND TEMPLE SECTS; GREEK AND JEWISH PHILOSOPHY; "ANTISEMITISM" IN ANTIQUITY 10/10

Seltzer, pp.178-183, 195-231

Schiffman, Texts, pp.199-211, 266-269, 275-281; 292-299

12. RISE OF RABBINIC JUDAISM; JEWISH REVOLT AGAINST ROME; JEWISH-CHRISTIAN SCHISM 10/12

Seltzer, pp.183-194, 231-245

FALL BREAK 10/15-21

PAPER TOPICS FROM THOSE DOING A PAPER DUE NEXT CLASS. These require instructor approval.

13. FIRST TWO CENTURIES B.C.E.; EMERGENCE OF RABBINIC JUDAISM 10/24

Seltzer, pp.243-260

Schiffman, Texts, pp.512-514, 523, 527-528

Rabbi Ishmael's hermeneutic rules and examples; handout

Baskin, pp.43-67

14. MISHNAH AND TALMUD 10/26

Adin Steinsaltz, The Essential Talmud, chps. 16-20, 24-25, pp.115-174, 199-211

15. "LEARNING" TALMUD; RABBINIC WORLDVIEW 10/31

Seltzer, pp. 260-306 (top)

Baskin, pp.68-93

16. ISLAM AND THE JEWS 11/2

Seltzer, pp.325-334

Norman Stillman, The Jews of Arab Lands, pp.1-53, 149-161

17. JEWISH COMMUNITY STRUCTURE AND AUTHORITY UNDER ISLAM; KARAITE SCHISM 11/7

Seltzer, pp.334-349

Schiffman, Texts, pp.749-761

Stillman, pp.176-179, 181-188, 192-193, 198-199
18. JEWISH WOMEN, MEN, FAMILY, AND SOCIETY DURING THE ISLAMIC MIDDLE AGES 11/9

SECOND ESSAY ASSIGNMENT DUE TODAY IN CLASS

S. D. Goitein, A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza, vol. 3, pp.142-221

19. ASHKENAZ: JEWS, JUDAISM, JEWISH COMMUNITY IN MEDIEVAL CHRISTIAN EUROPE 11/14

A History of the Jewish People, ed. H. H. Ben-Sasson, chp. 25, selections, pp.403-413 only


Schiffman, Texts, pp.574-583, 589-590

Robert Chazan, Church, State and Jew in the Middle Ages, pp.57-70

20. SPAIN: "GOLDEN AGE" 11/16

Jane Gerber, The Jews of Spain, pp.28-89

Baskin, pp.115-134

21. MEDIEVAL JEWISH PHILOSOPHY 11/21

Seltzer, 373-408

Handout, Maimonides

THANKSGIVING 11/23 NO CLASS

22. KABBALAH 11/28

Seltzer, pp. 419-450

Handout, Zohar
23. JEWISH-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS: JEWISH ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR 11/30

Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance*, chps. 1-5, pp.3-63

24. JEWISH-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS: IMAGES AND ART 12/5

SPECIAL SESSION, CLASS IN ALLEN ART MUSEUM

Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and The Jews*, chps.1-3, 11-12, pp.11-52, 159-187 (pagination as in 1943 ed., if discrepancy, follow chp. numbers. Reading light this time, heavier for next class, read ahead if you can).

25. THE CRUSADES AND THE JEWS; JEWISH REACTIONS TO PERSECUTION 12/7

Robert Chazan, *In the Year 1096...*, pp.3-103

Chazan, *Church, State and Jew*, pp.97-100, 133-141

"Merciful Father" ("Av Harahamim," Sabbath liturgy) handout

26. RITUAL MURDER, HOST DESECRATION ACCUSATIONS; THEOLOGICAL DISPUTATIONS; CONFISCATING, BURNING THE TALMUD; BLACK DEATH; EXPULSIONS 12/12


Film: "The Disputation"

27. SPANISH EXPULSION; END OF AN ERA? 12/14

Jane Gerber, *The Jews of Spain*, pp.91-144

Chazan, *Church, State and Jew*, pp. 319-322