

Shulamit Magnus

Oberlin College

Fall 2013

GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN JEWISH SOCIETY, ANTIQUITY TO MODERNITY

Jewish Studies/ History 237 Tues., Th 9:30-10:50 King 237

Shulamit.Magnus@Oberlin.edu Office: 310 Rice 5-8529

Office hours: Tu and Th 2:30-4:00 by self sign-up, sheets on my door weekly. Other times by email appointment.



COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course explores historical realities of women and men in Jewish society by foregrounding gender and sexuality in Jewish experience.

We study women's history and the construction and workings of gendered behavior, sexuality, maleness, and femaleness in Jewish societies from antiquity to the twentieth century in cultural (Sephardic, Ashkenazic, Middle Eastern), and chronological context.

We explore biblical and rabbinic texts whose legacy continues to this day; compare normative constructions of women's and men's societal and sexual roles in law and custom with social realities; study gender and power relations in family and society; women, men, and religion; women's economic and communal functions, literacy, feminism.

We will ask: how did gender shape Jewish historical experience? What was Jewish women's historical experience, and how and why did this differ from or coincide with that of men? How is Jewish history conceptualized differently when women's experience is included and when the workings of gender are explored in the historical experience of men?

SKILLS GOALS: Students will learn how to approach as historians such varied primary and secondary sources as medieval communal ordinances, prenuptial and divorce documents; women's letters, memoirs, and rituals; biography; memoir; sociological and anthropological studies; contemporary feminist writing and writing about hetero- and homosexual Jews and Judaism. You will gain experience in discussion; in making targeted, coherent oral presentations; and in writing substantively and cogently.

Successful completion of this course gives JWST, HIST, GWST, CD, and Wr credit.

REQUIREMENTS Basics here, see details on separate, *Guides to the Course* document

1. Attendance: will be noted and count in the final grade.

PLEASE NOTE that there are three missed class sessions at the beginning of the semester, noted on the syllabus, and two REQUIRED makeup class sessions.

2. Thoughtful preparation of assigned readings. There are about 60 pages of reading (not including notes, illustrations), per class.

All assigned reading is on Mudd shelf reserve; it is not realistic to rely on this routinely. You are expected to have your own copies of titles on the Required for Purchase list, below, ordered in the Bookstore. Material not in these titles is available electronically on the course bb site. Direct questions/ issues about shelf or electronic sources to the Reserve Room supervisor, Michael.palazzolo@oberlin.edu; I can only email him so go straight to the source; same for Bookstore, but do cc me about any such issues and see me for any problems your efforts do not resolve.

Should class be cancelled for any reason (e.g., weather), prepare the cancelled session's reading and that for the following class for its date: stay current with the syllabus.

REQUIRED FOR PURCHASE:

Steven Greenberg, *Wrestling with God and Men: Homosexuality in the Jewish Tradition*

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*

Please bring readings on the Required for Purchase list to class.

While not required for purchase, please bring a Hebrew Bible to class when assigned readings reference biblical sources. I recommend the JPS paperback edition, *Tanakh*.

3. Active, informed participation in class.
4. One-page observation/ analysis papers (OPs) on assigned readings.
5. 1-2 short (7-10 minute, enforced) lead-off presentations.
6. One in-class essay/ terms assignment; one short (5 page) essay/ ID assignment; final, 10-12 page research paper.

GRADING:

Participation: 40% including observation papers; presentation/s; participation in class.

Written work: 60%: first assignment: 15%; essay: 20%; final paper: 25%

A+ 100-97; A 96-93; A- 92-90; B+ 89-87; B 86-83; B- 82-80; C+ 79-77; C 76-73; C- 72-70; D 65-69; F below 65.

HONOR CODE: College rules require that all written work have a signed Honor Code. See the HC section on the College website, the Honor Code committee, reference librarians, me, with any questions.

Disabilities: I will accommodate arrangements filed through the Office of Disabilities

Welcome to the course!

1. Introductory 9/3

What is "gender"? What is Jewish gender?

Writing women out of Jewish history, writing them in; male "normativity," or 'Jews' and 'Jewesses'; heteronormativity and Jewish society

NO CLASS 9/5 Rosh Hashana Makeup class: SUN. 9/15 10-11:15 AM

2. Jewish Gender 9/10

Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Yentl* (on bb, any edition, ok)

3. Reversing the Gaze: Seeing Judaism and Jewish Society Through a Same Sex Lens 9/12

Steven Greenberg, *Wrestling With God and Men: Homosexuality in the Jewish Tradition*, Introduction, chp. 1, pp. 3-59. (Bring Hebrew Bible to this and subsequent classes).

4. Sex and Gender in Classical Jewish Sources *MAKEUP CLASS Sun. 9/15 10-11:15 AM

Lead off:

Greenberg, chps.2-6, pp. 60-112

5. Sex and Gender, continued 9/17

Lead off:

Greenberg, chps. 7-11, pp. 113-174

* NO CLASS 9/19 Sukkot

6. Sex and Gender, continued 9/24

Greenberg, chps. 12-13, pp. 175-214

"The Greenbergs: All Happy Families are Not the Same;" "Customizing Motherhood," and "Express Male," in *Lilith*, 35/2 (Summer, 2010), pp.33-39

NO CLASS 9/26 Sukkot MAKEUP CLASS 9/29

7. History: Rethinking and Unthinking Assumptions; Women in "the Rabbinic Period" MAKEUP CLASS SUN. 9/29 10-11:15 AM

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

Ross Kraemer, "Jewish Women in the Diaspora World of Late Antiquity," in Baskin, ed., *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, pp.43-67 (N.B.: pagination as in the 1991 edition. If you use a different edition, go by author/ title of assigned chapter).

Judith Romney Wegner, "The Image and Status of Women in Classical Rabbinic Judaism," in Baskin ed., chp. 3, pp.68-93

8. Rabbinic Law and Women ("Woman") Or: Are Women Jews? 10/1

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 a great job of clarifying things but be patient with the type of discourse and with yourself if this is new to you (though having read Greenberg should help). Bring any questions or needed clarifications to class; get the gist of the reading; focus on what you get, as well as

anything you don't. There will be no lead off today (unless someone really wants this one); I will present a fair amount. Do OPs as usual.

9. Rabbinic Law, continued: Marriage, Divorce 10/3

Lead off:

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

Google the term "*agunah*"; look up JOFA—the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance-- on line and note their material on "*agunah*."

10. Law, continued: Sex, Marriage, "Family Purity" 10/8

Lead off:

Biale, chps.5-6, pp. 121-174

Devorah Hammer, "Blood Rhythms: Sex in an Orthodox Marriage," *Lilith* (Spring, 2003): 26-29

11. IN CLASS ESSAY/ ID Assignment 10/10

12. Women and Rabbinic Law: Women's Experience and Agency 10/15

Lead off:

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 (a fair number of these pages are Notes)

Bella Chagall, *Burning Lights*, "Heritage," "The Bath," "Sabbath," "Sukkot" (Schocken ed.), pp.9-11, 25-62, 96-105 (memoir, easy read)

In class: *tkhine*, handout

Make an appointment to see me for approval of your paper topic and a preliminary bibliography before Fall Break. A revised proposal is due upon return from Break.

13. Jewish Marriage, Family, and Women: Under Medieval Islam 10/17

Lead off:

S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society, An Abridgement in One Volume* ed. J. Lassner (use THIS edition), Map (unnumbered but would be pp.6-7); Introduction (selection), chps. 12-13, pp.9-27 only, 331-384 Focus on themes, not details per se. How does social reality dovetail with, differ from, law we have studied?

FALL BREAK 10/19- 10/27 Final paper proposal (1-2 pp.) and Bibliography (1p.) due next class

14. Under Medieval Islam, continued 10/29

Submit your paper proposal and Bibliography.

Lead off:

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

15. Medieval Jewish Women: Europe 10/31

Lead off:

Avraham Grossman, *Pious and Rebellious, Jewish Women in Medieval Europe*, Introduction, chps. 2-3, 5 (selection), pp.1-7, 33-67, 102-121

16. In Medieval Europe, continued 11/5

Lead off:

Grossman, chps.6-7, pp.123-173

17. In Medieval Europe, continued 11/7

Lead off:

Grossman, chps. 8-11, 13, pp.174-252, 273-281

18. Early Modernity: Glikl Hamel 11/12

Lead off:

The Memoirs of Glueckel of Hameln, Lowenthal ed., pp.1-108 A deceptively easy read: this is a very important historical source. Why?

19. Glikl, continued 11/14

Lead off:

The Memoirs, pp.108-239

20. Glikl, conclusion; Modernity, Women, and Radical Assimilation 11/19

Lead off:

The Memoirs, pp.239-277

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

Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehudah Reinharz, eds., third edition, *The Jew in the Modern World*, pp.805- 806, 808-809 (in 2nd. ed., pp. 257-258, 260-261)

21. Modern Marriage and Family Patterns 11/21

Lead off:

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

22. Women and the Jewish Middle Class: Germany 11/26

Lead off:

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

NO CLASS 11/28 THANKSGIVING

23. Jewish Emancipation and Women's Emancipation in the Community: Germany
12/3

Lead off:

Marion Kaplan, *The Jewish Feminist Movement in Germany*, chps. 3, 5, pp.59-93 (-102 are Notes), 147-168

24. Women's Religion: Eastern Europe 12/5

Lead off:

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)

25. Women's Religion: Middle East 12/10

Lead off:

Susan Sered, *Women as Ritual Experts*, Introduction, chps.1, 2, 4, 5, pp.3-48, 65-102

26. Tradition and Assimilation: Eastern Europe, Course Conclusions 12/10

Lead off:

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

Pauline Wengeroff, *Memoirs of a Grandmother*, trans., ed., S. Magnus, selections TBA.

Lucy Dawidowicz, ed., *The Golden Tradition*, pp.206-209, 388-393 (Sara Shenirer, Puah Rakowski)

Shulamit Magnus, "Reinventing Miriam's Well: Feminist Jewish Ceremonials," in *The Uses of Tradition*, ed. Jack Wertheimer, pp.331-347