“Out of the innumerable religious traditions, cults, and movements of the early Roman empire, two alone transformed themselves to outlast that empire—even to our own time. The remarkable thing is that both had their origins in sects of Judaism—hardly the most powerful or conspicuous of Roman religions. Those two are rabbinic Judaism and Christianity.” — Wayne Meeks (Foreword to S. D. Cohen, From the Maccabees to the Mishnah)

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course is a thematic survey of Jewish history from biblical antiquity through the medieval period in Christian and Islamic realms. No background is assumed or required (but if you have some such, get ready to re-think)!

Among other questions, it addresses that which Wayne Meeks, above, poses—but carries it beyond the Roman period, through the medieval. It asks this not as a theological question, but an historical one. How DID this group transform itself and persevere, surviving not only conquest and loss of sovereignty, but dispersion and statelessness? How did it continue to communicate a shared sense of self over such a length of time and in such different contexts?
COURSE OBJECTIVES: Our goal is not to “cover” this immense period but to grapple with major dynamics in Jewish experience: origins, evolution, rupture, continuity. Our emphasis is on historical questions: not just what happened (crucial information, but not our focus, per se), but why and how it did—and how we, as historians know. Our approach may thus differ from how you may have studied history in general or aspects of our subject in other contexts-- which I hope will be one of its chief contributions to your learning!

The course takes us to many different geographical, cultural, and chronological locations but has BASIC THEMES throughout: how this group defined itself and both borrowed from larger cultural surroundings and drew boundary lines and distinction; construction of “normative” and “sectarian” religious beliefs, texts, and institutions; attitudes to power and to rulers, indigenous and foreign; notions of homeland, sovereignty, and exile; economic, religious and political status; women’s status, family life, community; survival strategies as a stateless minority under Christian and Muslim rule; persecution and responses.

Content goals: students will become conversant with the themes outlined, above, able to raise and discuss questions about them in comparative perspective.

Skills goals: students will learn how to read and assess primary and secondary sources in historical study, including (especially!) those not written for historical purposes; to discuss and present on issues in the readings orally, in class, and to assess them cogently in written work.

This course is a requirement for the history track of the JWST major and for some upper level JWST courses. It can be taken for JWST or HIST credit or both; successful completion gives SS, CD, and Wr credit.

REQUIREMENTS: Basics here; details at end of the syllabus. Please see me with any questions.

This is largely a lecture course conducted to engage active student participation.

1. ATTENDANCE will be noted and count in the final grade. If you must miss a class, please email me as soon as you are able. If any circumstance impedes your ability to attend or fulfill any other requirement in an ongoing way, do see me promptly, so I can help best.

PLEASE NOTE:
There are three missed class dates at the beginning of the semester, including its second scheduled meeting (9/5; 9/19, and 9/26), for which we will hold TWO REQUIRED makeup classes on Sundays at the usual class time; noted on the syllabus, further details in class.

2. READING: thoughtful preparation of readings, about 60 pp. for each class or its equivalent, for the session assigned.

I expect you to have your own copies of titles on the "Required for Purchase" list, below, which I’ve ordered in the Bookstore. Reading in these titles is NOT on bb. Other required reading is. All assigned reading has been ordered on shelf reserve in Mudd but it’s not realistic to rely on this. Ohio Link is another option, requiring advance planning. Direct all questions about shelf or electronic readings to the Reserve Supervisor, mpalazzolo@oberlin.edu. All I can do is email him so go straight to the source-- same for the Bookstore— but do also cc me and tell me of any problem your efforts do not resolve.

If illness or other circumstance prevents your doing readings, come to class anyway and see me.

REQUIRED FOR PURCHASE:

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


Susan Niditch, *Ancient Israelite Religion*

Jane Gerber, *The Jews of Spain*

Robert Chazan, *In the Year 1096: The First Crusades and the Jews*

Whenever reading is assigned from a primary text in a book you own (e.g., Bible), or have printed out from bb (Schiffman; Chazan, *Church*), please bring that to class.

3. ORAL: 1-2 short (5-7 minute) lead-off presentations.

4. WRITTEN:

One in-class quiz and document analysis (10/10); one take-home essay/ ID assignment; one in-class, final exam OR paper; one-page write-up of your leadoff presentation on the day you present. All work must have your name, date, be paginated and, if sheets, be stapled.
Deadlines: Except in case of documented illness or emergency, late submission results in 1/3 grade reduction/day (A- becomes a B+, etc.), from the point work was due. College rules require that the course final exam or paper be submitted on the day/time set for the course by the Registrar; see their site.

**GRADING:**
Oral presentation and write-up: 15% (includes attendance and participation)
Quiz/ document analysis: 25%
Essay assignment: 25%
Final exam or paper: 35%

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 written work to have a signed Honor Code declaration: “I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment.” Students are responsible for understanding all the Honor Code entails. See the OC site, “Honor Code,” Mudd Reference librarians, me, with any questions.

Disabilities: I will accommodate arrangements processed through the Office of Disabilities.

*Welcome to the course!*

1. **Introductory 9/3**

What brings us to this material? Subjective engagement and academic study: opposing positions?

What is "Jewish" history? Were Abraham, Sarah, Joseph, Moses, Miriam--historical characters? Jews?

Assumptions and biases in the study of Jewish history: "B.C."/ "B.C.E." "A.D."/ "C.E."
"Old Testament; "Hebrew Bible; “The Bible”; “Torah”; “Tanakh”

Hebrews"; "Israelites"; "Jews"; “non-Jews”

Reading texts: Genesis 1:1-3:6

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

NO CLASS 9/5  Rosh Hashana *make up class: Sun. 9/15 time, TBA; see below.

2. The Hebrew Bible: Historical Overview of the Period(s), Reading the Text  9/10

IN CLASS: 11 Kings 22: 1-18, 23:1-3, 19-25. We will parse these texts together, be sure to bring your copy of Tanakh to class.

The Jews, Efron et. al. (henceforth, “Efron”), pp.1-6, to end of first paragraph only

Susan Niditch, Ancient Israelite Religion, chp.1, pp.3-32 and "Timeline" at back of the book

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

*  In Biblical readings the first number signifies chapter, followed by colon and verse number. If only the name of a biblical book with number/s but no colon appears, the number refers to the chapter, all of which is to be read (e.g., Deuteronomy 15-17= read chapters 15, 16, and 17).

In class: Gilgamesh Epic in comparison with the Biblical flood tale

3. Foundational Myths: Origins, Patriarchs, Matriarchs, God  9/12

Leadoff:

Niditch, chp. 2, pp.34-69


4. Foundational Myths, continued: Tribes; Egypt; Exodus; Sinai  *MAKEUP CLASS SUN. 9/15  TIME TBA

Leadoff:
The reading for today is largely Biblical texts. Read as historians and students of myth, using methods Niditch and Efron discuss and which we have seen in class.

Ask yourself: what story is being constructed, with what messages and purposes? What would an ancient hearer of these myths take from them? Note themes, main story lines, sub-plots, editorial seams, and different genres -- narrative; legal; ritual. What theology is expressed in these texts: who is God, how does God operate in the cosmos and in particular, toward the characters in the stories, Israelite and otherwise?

Niditch, chp. 4, pp. 70-87 only

Genesis 28:10-30:25, 31: 1-3 and verses 36-54; 32: 1-33, 33:1-18, 35:1-29. Run your eyes quickly over chp. 36 and ask yourself: why is this material here? Why is it included?

Genesis 37, 39-43:2, 44: 11-34, 45-48:9, 49:28-50:26 (that is, to the end of the Book of Genesis);

Optional: if you wish some help approaching interpretation of these texts, take a look at this chapter (on shelf reserve and bb) — but only AFTER you’ve read the Biblical material and worked with the questions, above: Ilana Pardes, “Imagining the Birth of Ancient Israel: National Metaphors in the Bible,” in Biale, ed., Cultures of the Jews, pp.9-37

5. Law, Covenant, Ritual   9/17

Leadoff:

Niditch, chps. 4(partial)-5, pp.87-118


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

NO CLASS 9/19 (Sukkot)   Makeup class: SUN. 9/29 at our usual class time.

6. Conquest (?) of Canaan; Israeli Kingdoms, Empire   9/24

Leadoff:

Efron, pp.6-14, through first paragraph only.

I Samuel 8, 9:1-10:1, 13:1-5, 15:35, 16:1-13, 17:1-54 II Samuel 5:1-9 (*there are two books of Samuel—and some other biblical books; roman numeral before the name indicates first or second book, rest is the same convention).


NO CLASS 9/26 (Sukkot)

7. God, Society and History in Israelite Classical Prophecy; Monotheism; Destruction and Exile; Israel; Judah MAKEUP CLASS SUN. 9/29 at the usual class time

Leadoff:

Efron, pp.14-15, 18-24


(Biblical books): Amos 2:4-8, 4, 5:7-14, 8:4-12, Micah 3, 4:1-6, Hosea 8:11-14, Isaiah 1, 10, 47, 51-52, 60, 6, Deut. 11, 28, 30, Lamentations, 1-2

8. Exile and Return; Second Temple Theocracy; Canonizing "Scripture" 10/1

Leadoff:

Efron, pp.25-47

Jeremiah, 1-2, 5, 7, 25, 29:1-14; Ezekiel 5:5-17, 37; Psalms 137

(Biblical books): Ezra 1, 2:1-58; 3, 5, 6:1-5, 7, 9; Nehemiah 1-2, 8-10


Any wishing to do or even considering the final paper option, see me. This does NOT commit you to this option. You can always choose to take the final. And vice versa.

Leadoff:

Efron, pp.49-57
10. Hellenizers, Zealots, Maccabees: Jewish Culture Wars (or: "What is Hannukah?")

Leadoff:

Efron, pp.57-62

Schiffman, *Texts*, pp.136-138, 145-147, 151-169, 711-713 As you read these original sources about the persecution and rebellion under Antiochus, identify opposing factions in Jewish society. Ask what factors—socioeconomic, political, religious-- underlay the differences and hostilities, and what connection any of this had to Greek rule, and to rebellion against it. Or—was that what (some) Jews rebelled against? Which came first, religious persecution, or rebellion (to which the persecution was the response)?

Why would a polytheist regime institute a religious persecution, when polytheism, unlike monotheism, is religiously relativistic and tolerant? (or, was it?)

11. Quiz; document analysis  10/10

The quiz (in class) will ask you to discuss an assigned Biblical text against analysis in assigned secondary readings/ discuss terms.

12. Judea and Rome; Second Temple Sects, Greek and Jewish Outlooks and Philosophy  10/15

Leadoff:

Efron, pp.62-68

Shaye Cohen, *From the Maccabees*, chp. 5, pp. 124-164


13. Jesus-Followers; Rise of Rabbinic Judaism; Jewish Revolts Against Rome; Destruction of Jerusalem, Jewish Responses  10/17
Leadoff:

Efron, pp.70-91

Cohen, *From Maccabees*, chp. 5, pp.164-168 only


**FALL BREAK 10/19-10/27** Topic statement and preliminary Bibliography due next class from for those doing the paper option. These CAN change-- see me for any guidance.

14. *First Centuries of the Common Era; Triumph of Rabbinic Judaism; Boundary Lines* 10/29

Those doing the paper option, submit your proposal and Bibliography.

Leadoff:

Efron, chp. 5, pp. 92-113 (you can skip the boxes in these pages, except p.113)

Shaye Cohen, *From Maccabees*, chp.6 (selections), 7, pp.201-209 only, 214-231

Schiffman, *Texts*, pp.415-421, 512-514, 517-520 (top), 523 (bottom)-532

In class study: Rabbi Ishmael's hermeneutic rules and examples: in Schiffman, pp.531-532. Please bring these pages to class.

15. *Mishnah and Talmud* 10/31

Leadoff:


Schiffman, Texts, pp. 699-703


Leadoff:

Schiffman, *Texts*, pp.719-727, 732 (middle)-734

In-class “yeshiva” text study; handout

17. Islam and the Jews; Jewish Communal Structure and Authority Under Islam; Karaite Schism 11/7

Essay assignment questions distributed; essay due Mon. 11/18 by 9 AM

Leadoff:

Efron, pp.116-127 (mid-page), 132-136


Schiffman, *Texts*, pp.750-756

18. Jewish Women, Men, Family, and Society During the Islamic Middle Ages 11/12

Leadoff:

Efron, p.127


19. Ashkenaz: Jews, Judaism, Jewish Community in Medieval Christian Europe 11/14

Leadoff:


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

Louis Finkelstein, Jewish Self-Government in the Middle Ages, chps. 1-3, selections, pp.6-31 only

In-class text study: medieval rabbinic Biblical commentary; takkanot; herem

Essay assignment due in hard copy 11/18 by 9AM

20. Spain: "Golden Age" (?) 11/19

Leadoff:

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

21. Medieval Jewish Philosophy 11/21

Leadoff:

Efron, 136 (bottom, 2nd column)-145

Robert Seltzer, Jewish People, Jewish Thought, chp. 8, selection, pp.373-408 (top) only. Don’t fret if you find this more dense than our usual reading—it is! Just—be philosophical about it… we’ll take it step by step in class.

Handout: Maimonides

22. Kabbalah 11/26

Leadoff:

Joseph Dan, Kabbalah: A Very Short Introduction, chps. 1-4, pp.3-61

In Class handout: Zohar

NO CLASS 11/28 Thanksgiving

We will hold this class in the Allen Art Museum. Meet IN THE MUSEUM at class start time.

Efron, pp. 147-152


Robert Chazan, *In the Year 1096: The First Crusades and the Jews*, chp. 1, pp.3-26

Those interested in this subject or for papers, see Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance*, chps. 1-5, pp. 3-63.

**24. The Crusades and the Jews; Jewish Reactions to Persecution  12/5**

Leadoff:

Chazan, *In the Year 1096*, chps. 3-4, pp.51-103

Chazan, *Church, State and Jew*, pp.99-100, 133-141

In class: "Merciful Father" ("Av Harahamim") prayer

**24. Judeophobia: Ritual Murder, Host Desecration Accusations; Theological Disputations, Confiscating, Burning the Talmud; Black Death; Expulsions  12/10**

Efron, pp.152-169


Film: "The Disputation" See this film FOR this class. We will arrange 1-2 group viewings in Mudd on Sun./Mon. Munchies provided by Jewish Studies.

Every group of students I’ve ever taught finds this film – funny! Let’s see if we make that a perfect record – but also see how closely the film follows the text of the disputation of Barcelona, as we know it. So-- best do the readings before viewing the film.

**26. Spanish Expulsion; End of an Era? Course Conclusions  12/12**
Jane Gerber, *The Jews of Spain*, pp. 91-144

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

GUIDE TO THE COURSE

Here are specifics of Course Requirements, outlined above, and other information I hope will be helpful. Do ask me any questions or for clarifications.

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION: If you must miss class for any reason, please let me know. If any circumstance interferes with your ability to attend class or fulfill any other course requirement in an ongoing way, please see me as soon as you think there even might be a problem. I will work with you as much as possible but can help you best with prompt alert.

If you miss class, do the readings and get quality notes and any announcements and/or handouts from other students—but put priority on staying current with the class; make up missed work as quickly as you are able; see me if you need help. It is more effective to have a student discuss notes with you than to just get them; this review helps the other student, too, and all should consider this a service you may need yourself! Once you’ve done this, I am happy to meet with you about the missed session, as well.

The two makeup classes for the missed sessions at the start of the semester are REQUIRED except in case of documented, immovable class conflict or emergency only, in which case, alternative arrangements for missed class must be made and documented; see me. Please make note now makeup class dates and time.

If class session is cancelled for any reason, e.g., weather, PREPARE AS USUAL for the missed class day, and do the next reading for its scheduled time: stay current with the syllabus.

READING: I welcome, will ask, and will note your informed input during class. This is weighted to help your grade: I will count great participation more than lack of it; I will consider such participation when weighing final grade, in which it could make the difference when a grade could go either way. To speak up in class, you do NOT have to have “the answer;” on the contrary, a good question can be just as good, or better! And learning comes from engaging, not from expecting to be perfect to begin with. Certainly ask me in class if anything in the reading or in class is not clear.

Lectures and discussions assume and build on your thoughtful preparation of readings, as do the quiz and essay assignment.
WRITING:

ESSAY: I will distribute essay topic choices at least a week in advance of the submission due date. They will draw on assigned readings and class discussions only, and your work should, too—no off syllabus sources. Submit the essay in hard copy, no electronic submissions (except, if needed, to establish submission by the deadline).

I recommend the following short, very useful paperbacks. Rampolla and Benjamin include guides to reading and note taking, as well. They will be useful in other courses, too.

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*

Use of Rampolla or Benjamin is REQUIRED for those choosing the paper option, for construction of the Bibliography and Notes that are required in the paper only.

TIPS TO EFFECTIVE READING:

When you finish a reading or a chunk of it, stop and ask yourself what impressions you are left with—*what you have learned*. Ask yourself WHY what struck you did.

What *thesis* is the author is arguing, using what *evidence*? What are the *implications* of the argument? If you were telling someone who had not read it what the reading was about, what would you say?

Asking yourself these types of questions helps you focus on the *significance* of the details—which is what the study of history is about. Making short notations of your responses to these questions will help your learning and make your reading more effective.

Doing this is different than taking notes; it’s what you do *after* you’ve absorbed sheer, new information.

LEAD OFF PRESENTATION:

The point of the lead off presentation this is not to tell us what’s in the reading nor is it for sheer subjective reactions. Leadoffs are for YOUR TAKE on a FEW aspects of the reading that you think are significant. Give about 3 (not more!—there won’t be time) observations.
When there is assigned primary material, at least one of your comments should focus on that.

Use “Tips to Reading,” above, to help you prepare your leadoff/s. I am happy to meet with you about it, too.

Practice your presentation before friends (or a mirror)—you’ll see how fast the time goes.

On the day of your presentation, submit a 1-page, double-spaced, typed outline of your presentation; no late submission. Be sure your name and signed Honor Code is on it, with and session number and date of presentation.

Should there be two students leading off a session, DO NOT “split” the reading between you. EACH student does the entire assignment, reading and oral. Meet with one another a day before the class to discuss your points to prevent duplication/repetition.

We will do leadoff assigning in class but it is each student’s responsibility to be signed up for 1-2 presentations (class size will determine the number of presentations per student). If you should wish to switch your date, fine with me if you find a partner and both confirm this with me.

PAPER OPTION:

You may opt to write a 10-12 page research paper on a topic on or related to the syllabus instead of the final exam, due at the date and time of that exam. You must speak get my consent for your topic by fall Break and submit a statement of topic and preliminary Bibliography upon return from Break.

Having done any of the above, you may always choose to take the Final exam. You can go in the other direction, too, but the sooner you begin thinking about and researching your topic, the better. I am happy to help in all aspects, from choosing a doable topic to Bibliography.

WRITING GUIDELINES for the essay and paper:

Substantiated analysis addressing the essay question posed, and clear, effective writing, using correct grammar and spelling, are expected and will form the main basis for the grade. Use assigned readings and class discussions only for the essay. The paper requires additional reading; see me for help keeping this reasonable.
Your work must be self-sufficient: comprehensible to an intelligent, interested reader who knows nothing about your subject. This is your imagined reader: address her/him.

Cite specifics to illustrate points; be precise, use quotes sparingly, if at all, and always ONLY to illustrate a point YOU make, never to make a point. Bibliography and formal Notes should not be used in the essay; use abbreviated citation in the body of your text, e.g., (Chazan, Church, p.62), when paraphrasing or citing.

I am happy to meet with you and read drafts if you submit these at least two days in advance of expected comments. Do make use of Writing Tutors the College makes available and the writing guide books cited above. History essay writing is a complex skill. Drafts and re-writes--meaning enough time to reflect and revise--are essential. So are sleep and good nutrition!