

THIS DRAFT SYLLABUS IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Medieval and Early Modern Jewry
HIST 1610 (JWST 1610, RELS 1610, NELC 0355)



Spring 2023
Tuesday/Thursday 8:30–10:00 am
Yes, it's early. Do not fear!

Dr. Anne Albert
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Office hours: Thursday 10:00–11:00 am or by appointment, location TBA

This course follows the journey of a global diaspora over a millennium of cultural, intellectual, social, and religious change and migration. Learn how Jewish culture was transformed between antiquity and modernity, from the rise of Islam through the dawn of Enlightenment.

Throughout this time, Jewish people were intimate parts of and at the same time distinct from the many societies in which they lived. This basic duality is at the heart of this course, as we will explore how Jewish religion and culture evolved in different settings. Within this theme we will ask three interrelated questions. The first is about how Jewish culture got from there to here: Which features of community, ritual, or ideas were lost over time, and which endured? The second question is about the Jewish relationship to the majority: How were Jews treated and how did they respond? The past is often invoked in today's discourse, and we will come to a deeper understanding of these patterns. Finally, we will also pay attention to how people have sought to narrate Jewish history, noticing what meaning is made from different interpretations and how history can serve identity and community.

Along the way, we will meet mystics, merchants, rebels, and rabbis, seeking glimpses of the inner and outer lives of women and men, East and West. We will look for threads of continuity and moments of shift, decode illustrative texts, images, and documents (in English), and see how the Judaism that faced modernity had been shaped by a staggering array of different cultural circumstances after antiquity. We will look at anti-Jewish phenomena like expulsion and blood libel, but also coexistence and creative cultural synthesis, avoiding any simplistic narrative about the legacy of the premodern world in Jewish life today.

No previous knowledge of Judaism or Jewish history is expected. All are welcome!

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- To develop familiarity with the broad contours and main historical figures, events, and trends of medieval and early modern Jewish culture
- To explore the relationship of Jews to the wider world and the changes within Jewish society during this period
- To understand influential narratives and approaches used to interpret Jewish history
- To read and analyze primary sources critically with respect to their cultural contexts
- To practice communicating thoughtfully and persuasively about historical evidence

ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENTS

- Response Papers 30%
One page long, made up of primary source analysis or response to a prompt. Ten papers are required in all, five in each half of the semester.
- Midterm Exam 20%
To be held in class on March 2

- Final Exam 20%
To be held during the scheduled final exam time after reading period
- Final Project 30%
For this project your aim is to teach or interpret some element of medieval and early modern Jewish culture in a way that makes it matter to a specific present-day audience. Instead of an essay, you might choose to write an op-ed for a particular publication, a lesson plan for a particular age group and setting, or a Wikipedia entry. You may also create a YouTube video or TikTok. Or you may choose to write a traditional college essay, with the audience understood as a professor.
Whatever the genre, you must ground your observations in verifiable facts (primary source texts and documents) and informed interpretations of the past and think creatively about how presentation serves your audience. Each genre will have its own requirements for length and supplementary materials, which might include an explanatory statement, bibliography, etc. The project will be scaffolded over the course of the semester with intermediate deadlines to choose topics, sources, and genres and draft/revise the project.

SEE END OF SYLLABUS FOR COURSE POLICIES AND OTHER FINE PRINT

COURSE CALENDAR (TOPICS AND READINGS)

THURSDAY 1/12

Course Introduction: Practicalities, Periodization, Narratives, and Sources

Module I: Jews under Medieval Islam

TUESDAY 1/17

Jews under Islam: Society and Politics

- Lawrence Fine, *Judaism in Practice* [JIP], Introduction, 3–16 (pdf).
- Mark Cohen, "Islamic Policy Toward Jews," in *A History of Jewish-Muslim: From the Origins to the Present*, ed. Abdelwahab Meddeb and Benjamin Stora, 58–69 (pdf)
- Primary texts:
 - Pact of Umar: *Heritage Source Reader* [HSR] 3.11 (84–86)
 - How the Jizya Is to be Collected and from Whom: *JAL* 159–61 (pdf)
- Supplementary:
 - Oded Zinger, "'She Aims to Harass Him': Jewish Women in Muslim Legal Venues in Medieval Egypt," *AJS Review* 42:1 (April 2018), 159–92 (pdf)

THURSDAY 1/19

Karaites and Rabbanites

- Stillman, "The Jewish Experience Under Islam," *Cambridge Guide*, 85–107 (pdf)

- Berger, “The Centrality of the Talmud,” *Cambridge Guide*, 317–21 (pdf)
- Primary texts:
 - Saadia’s Anti-Karaite Polemic: *HSR* 3.14
 - Karaite Refutation: *HSR* 3.15
- Supplementary:
 - Marina Rustow, *Heresy and the Politics of Community: The Jews of the Fatimid Caliphate*, Introduction, xv–xxii; and Chapter 3, 67–87 (pdfs)

TUESDAY 1/24

Maimonides: Life, Law, and Philosophy

- Seeskin, “Jewish Philosophy,” *Cambridge Guide* 381–86 (pdf)
- Kraemer, “Moses Maimonides: An Intellectual Portrait,” in *Cambridge Companion to Maimonides* (pdf): read the whole thing but focus on pages 34–45
- Primary texts:
 - Sources by and about Maimonides, #s 7–11, *JIP* 426–28
 - Maimonides, selected excerpts, *HSR* 114–19
- Supplementary:
 - Eve Krakowski, “Maimonides’ Menstrual Reform in Egypt,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 110.2 (Spring 2020): 245–89.

THURSDAY 1/26

“Golden Age”: Science, Poetry, *Convivencia*

- Scheindlin, “Merchants and Intellectuals, Rabbis and Poets: Judeo-Arabic Culture in the Golden Age of Islam,” *Cultures of the Jews* 11–14, 59–75 (pdf)
- Cohen, “The ‘Golden Age’ of Jewish-Muslim Relations: Myth and Reality,” in *A History of Jewish-Muslim Relations: From the Origins to the Present Day*, ed. Abdelwahab Meddeb and Benjamin Stora, 28–37 (pdf)
- Primary texts:
 - Hasdai ibn Shaprut, *HSR* 96–99
 - Judah Halevi, *Sefer Ha-Kuzari*, *HSR* 112–13
 - A Medieval Curriculum *JAL* 226–28

TUESDAY 1/31

Geniza and Module I review

- No reading

Module II: In Christendom

THURSDAY 2/2

Into Christendom: Migration, Community, and Status

- Chazan, “Jewish Life in Western Christendom” in *Cambridge Guide*, 113–38 (pdf)

- Primary texts:
 - The Charter of Bishop Rudiger of Speyer, *HSR* 122–24
 - Legal Questions Regarding Communal Authority, *The Jews in Christian Europe* 285–89 (pdf)
- Supplementary: TBA

TUESDAY 2/7

Religious Encounter and Rabbinic Innovation

- David Berger, “Mutual Perceptions and Attitudes” in *Cambridge History* 54–75 (pdf)
- Primary texts: TBA
- Supplementary:
 - Ivan Marcus, “A Jewish-Christian Symbiosis,” *Cultures of the Jews* (excerpt, pages TBA)

THURSDAY 2/9

Kabbalah and the Zohar

- Tirosh-Samuelson, “Jewish Mysticism,” *Cambridge Guide* 399–413 (pdf)
- Arthur Green, “The Zohar: Jewish Mysticism in Medieval Spain,” in *An Introduction to the Medieval Mystics of Europe*, ed. Szarmach (pdf)
- Primary texts
 - “Divine Qualities” (pp. 50–51, with notes on pp 171–73) and “The Creation of God” (pp. 52–53, with notes on pp 173–76, in Matt, *Essential Kabbalah*)
 - Mystical eating and food practices in the Zohar, *JIP* 353–63
- Supplementary:
 - Daniel Matt, *The Essential Kabbalah: The Heart of Jewish Mysticism* (HarperSan Francisco, 1995), Introduction (pp. 1–17).

TUESDAY 2/14

Poetry, Songs, and Art

- Primary texts:
 - Selections from *Sefer ha-ma’sim*: Story numbers 2, 3, 6, 8, 12, and 43 (pdf)
 - Hebrew-French wedding songs (pdf)
 - Marc Michael Epstein, *The Medieval Haggadah*, 1–63 (ebook)
- Supplementary:
 - Kirsten Fudeman, “Hebrew-French Wedding Songs: Expressions of Identity,” Chapter 4 in *Vernacular Voices: Language and Identity in Medieval French Jewish Communities* (ebook)

THURSDAY 2/16

Anti-Judaism: Riots, Disputations, and Book Burnings

- Reading TBA
- Primary texts:
 - The Crusaders in Mainz, Marcus and Saperstein, *The Jews in Christian Europe*, 74–80

- The Burning of the Talmud, Marcus and Saperstein, *The Jews in Christian Europe*, 127–35
- Supplementary:
 - David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*, Introduction and Chapter 5

TUESDAY 2/21

Anti-Judaism: Blood Libel

- Magda Teter, *Blood Libel: On the Trail of an Antisemitic Myth*, 1–88 (ebook)

THURSDAY 2/23

Conversos and Spanish Expulsion

- Renée Levine Melammed, *A Question of Identity* (Oxford, 2004) 3-67 (pdf)
- Primary texts:
 - *JIP* 9 (Life Cycle Rituals)
 - “Renegade Jew: Luis de la Isla” in Kagan and Dyer (eds.), *Inquisitorial Inquiries: Brief Lives of Secret Jews and Other Heretics*, 21-35 (pdf)
 - Expulsion, *HSR* 4.21
 - Solomon Ibn Verga’s Analysis of the Causes of Jewish Suffering, *HSR* 158–59
- Supplementary:
 - David Nirenberg, “Was There Race Before Modernity? The Example of ‘Jewish’ Blood in Late Medieval Spain,” in *The Origins of Racism in the West*, ed. Eliav-Feldon et al.

TUESDAY 2/28

Review

THURSDAY 3/2

Midterm

-SPRING BREAK-

Module III: Early Modernity

TUESDAY 3/14

Knowledge Explosion and Religious Change

- Adam Shear, “Jews and Judaism in Early Modern Europe,” *Cambridge Guide*, 140–60 (pdf)
- Ruderman, “Knowledge Explosion,” *Early Modern Jewry*, 99–132 (ebook)
- Primary texts:
 - Printed Talmud page
 - Luther and the Jews, *The Jews in Christian Europe*, 212–19
- Supplementary: on Karo TBA

THURSDAY 3/16

Migration and Leadership, Western Europe

- Ruderman, “Jews on the Move,” *Early Modern Jewry*, 23–55 (ebook)
- Primary texts:
 - Samuel Usque’s Consolation for Israel’s Tribulations, *HSR* 156–7
 - Josel of Rosheim in Marcus and Saperstein, *The Jews in Christian Europe*, 436
 - Menasseh ben Israel, *Hope of Israel*, pages (not “locations”) 99–102, 105–115, 144–49 (ebook)
 - Menasseh ben Israel, *Humble Addresses*
- Supplementary:
 - Elisheva Carlebach, “Between History and Myth: The Regensburg Expulsion in Josel of Rosheim’s Sefer ha-Miknah,” in *Jewish History and Jewish Memory: Essays in Honor of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi*, ed. E. Carlebach, J. Efron, and D. Myers (Hanover, NH: Brandeis U Press, 1998), 40–53
 - Y. H. Yerushalmi, *Servants of Kings and Not Servants of Servants: Some Aspects of the Political History of the Jews* (Atlanta: Tam Institute for Jewish Studies, Emory University, 2005)

TUESDAY 3/21

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth

- Moshe Rosman, *Categorically Jewish, Distinctly Polish: Polish Jewish History Reflected and Refracted*, excerpt TBA
- Supplementary:
 - Adam Teller, *Rescue the Surviving Souls* (excerpt)

THURSDAY 3/23

Ghetto

- Daniel Schwartz, *Ghetto: The History of a Word*, Introduction and Chapter 1 ([ebook](#))
- Primary text:
 - Leon Modena’s Autobiography, *JIP* 453–69
- Supplementary:
 - Elliott Horowitz

TUESDAY 3/28

Women’s Religiosity

- Weissler, “For Women and Men Who Are Like Women” (pdf)
- Primary texts:
 - Tkhine of the Gate of Unification, *JIP* 66–68
 - Italian Jewish Women at Prayer, *JIP* 52–60 (focus on Text 5, 57–59)
- Supplementary:
 - Shalom Sabar in *Cultures of the Jews*

THURSDAY 3/30

Lurianic Kabbalah and Safed

- Shear, “Jews and Judaism,” 157–59 (pdf)
- Fine, *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos: Isaac Luria and His Mystical Fellowship*, chapter 3 (pdf)
- Primary texts:
 - HSR 5.13 (Safed)
 - HSR 5.14 (Life of Luria)

TUESDAY 4/4

Sabbatianism

- *Sabbatai Zevi: Testimonies to a Fallen Messiah* trans. with an intro. by David J. Halperin, Introduction and part of Baruch of Arezzo’s writings, 1–22, 27–72, 88–89 (ebook)
- Primary texts:
 - Glikl, in *JIP*, 486–95
 - A Christian Eye-Witness Account of Shabbetai Zevi, *HSR* 185–88

THURSDAY 4/6

FIRST DAYS OF PASSOVER, NO CLASS

Module IV: Toward Modernity

TUESDAY 4/11

Atlantic World

- Aviva Ben-Ur, *Jewish Autonomy in a Slave Society*, Introduction (up to p 18) and Chapter 4 (ebook)
- Primary texts:

THURSDAY 4/13

FINAL DAYS OF PASSOVER, NO CLASS

TUESDAY 4/18

Skepticism

- Yosef Kaplan, “*Bom Judesmo*,” in *Cultures of the Jews*
- Primary texts:
 - Spinoza in *The Jews of Christian Europe* and *HSR*
 - Uriel da Costa, TBA
- Supplementary:
 - Sutcliffe, “Imagining Amsterdam—The Dutch Golden Age and the Origins of Jewish Modernity” (pdf)

THURSDAY 4/20

Hasidism and Haskalah

- Jacob Katz, “The Emergence of the Neutral Society” and “The Haskala’s Vision of the Future,” *Tradition and Crisis*, chapters 23 and 24 (pdf)
- Primary texts:
 - “The Baal Shem Tov and Early Hasidism,” *HSR* 190–94
 - “The Scholarly Life of the Gaon of Vilna,” *JIP* 513–20
 - Moses Mendelssohn on Judaism and Enlightenment, *HSR* 213–15
- Supplementary:
 - Michael Meyer, “[Where Does the Modern Period of Jewish History Begin?](#)” *Judaism* 23 (1975) 329–38

TUESDAY 4/25

Review

COURSE POLICIES

- Books and Other Readings

This course requires about 50–70 pages of reading per week, of varying types and levels. Sometimes it will be basic. Sometimes it will be difficult. Sometimes it will surprise you. Learning how to work through it and profit from it is part of the work of the course. Almost every class session has primary texts assigned and a “supplementary” reading listed. Unless otherwise noted, it is **not** necessary to read these in advance. Many readings will be distributed in pdf via Canvas. For some, I will link to an ebook available via the Penn Libraries website, with guidance about how to navigate these resources. There are also a few books that you will be required to purchase, borrow, or otherwise procure on your own:

 - Hallo et al., [Heritage: Civilization and the Jews Source Reader](#) (Note: this is the SOURCE READER, NOT THE STUDY GUIDE. It's available on internet archive but that can be annoying to use so I recommend purchasing it or finding it from the library.)
 - Baskin and Seeskin (eds.), [Cambridge Guide to Jewish History, Religion, and Culture](#) **I am posting all readings from this book as pdfs, but we will use it a lot so you may want to acquire the book if you find it easier to read a paper copy.
 - Jacob Rader Marcus and Marc Saperstein (eds.), *The Jews in Christian Europe: A Source Book, 315-1791* (HUC Press, 2015)

If a book is only available by purchase and this presents a problem for you, please contact me confidentially.
- Absence and Preparation

Preparation, attendance, and active participation are required since each class includes reading, lecture, and discussion critical to achieving the course objectives. You have two free absences, with no need to tell me the reason. Things happen, we all go through things, and I don’t want to be in the business of policing you. However, for each absence after that, one point is deducted from your final grade. There are very, very few exceptions to this rule: in other words, even if you are sick or your cat is lost or your plumbing explodes, if you have already used your free days, you’ll lose a point. That is the reason for the

free days and you can make your own decisions about when and how to miss class with the knowledge of this consequence.

However, if you unexpectedly encounter a serious long-term issue, whether health-related or otherwise, that affects your attendance for more than two or three class sessions, I will work with you and the appropriate College staff to figure out how you can achieve the course objectives.

Whether or not you are in class, you will still be responsible for the course content from each class session. If there is sufficient interest, I will help organize students into a mutual aid society to share notes in a regular way.

The above policy does not apply to required absence due to Covid-19 illness or quarantine—on that, see below.

- Covid-19

We will follow the requirements of the School of Arts and Sciences as they evolve and we will make the best of whatever comes! Depending on the size of the class, the classroom setup, etc., we will figure out a passable way to include students who need to quarantine.

- Plagiarism

Copying without credit undermines your own achievements and unfairly exploits the labor and creativity of others. It's especially lame and unlikely to help you in a course like this that is oriented toward process, not outcome. Violations of this basic respect for intellectual property and for the integrity of our knowledge community will be taken very seriously, given a failing grade, and reported.

We will discuss my expectations for citation style in particular assignments. For general information, you may also consult "Academic Integrity at the University of Pennsylvania: A Guide for Students," which can be found here: <https://catalog.upenn.edu/pennbook/code-of-academic-integrity/>

- Communication

Email: I want you to succeed, I am happy to be a resource, and I am excited to talk with you about Jewish history and many other things. Feel free to email me any time. I will respond within 24 hours, or 48 if you email after 4 pm on a Friday. (In other words: responses may not be instantaneous.)

Meeting: If you'd like to speak face to face, we can do so in person during office hours or via Zoom by appointment.

- Changes to syllabus

I reserve the right to update the syllabus before the start of the semester and as we go along in order to respond to student progress and interests. I will give a week's notice for any changes to readings or to assignments that would shorten a deadline. It is important to check Canvas regularly for the most up to date course calendar; **the version given above is preliminary and should NOT be used for class preparation.**