

FALL 2023

NELC/RELS 0305: Great Books of Judaism: "JEWS WRITE THEIR HISTORY"

Professor Talya Fishman

M, F : 1:45 – 3:14 PM

tfishman@sas.upenn.edu

706 Williams

Course Description

Through close readings of primary and secondary sources, this course will explore the concerns that motivated Jews to write works of history; Jewish beliefs about the meaning of history -shaped, at times, by messianic expectations and/or a sense of Jewish exceptionalism- and Jewish periodizations of their own history. Attention will be paid to the temporal and cultural factors that shaped individual sources in Roman, Islamic and Christian lands and under the sway of ideologies like Hegelianism and Zionism. What are the boundaries between memoir, journalism and historiography? Selections range chronologically from the Hebrew Bible through 20th and 21st century historiographies of the Holocaust, the 6 Day War and the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Capstone project: Create two distinct documentary perspectives – in writing or in film-- on a current or recent event/development that affects the lives of Jews.

Requirements & Breakdown of Grading:

- (a) Regular attendance and active participation in class discussions. **25%**
- (b) Orally present 2 written questions/comments "interrogating" the sources in 10 classes. **25%**
- (c) **Session 8:** Class discussion on the changing meanings of events in ancient Jewish history. **7.5%**
- (d) Due **Session 11 (10/20):** 5-7 page on Israeli 10 part mini-series, "Our Boys" [*"Ha-Nea'rim"*], **OR** "Image of Victory". **OR** "Fires in the Mirror". Prompt to be distributed on Oct. 9th. **15%**
- (e) **Session 15: Class Discussion:** Compare & contrast Crusade Chronicle & Abyss of Despair. **7.5%**
- (f) **Sessions 24-25:** Presentations of student work capturing two documentary perspectives on a single event or development that affects the lives of Jews. **20%**

Preparing for Class:

PRINT the sources prior to each class. (6 pages per side is fine, if you can still read it!) **Make sure you have access to a working printer.**

READ the italicized questions and let them guide your reading.

ANNOTATE the sources with your comments and questions.

TEXTING DEVICES MAY NOT BE USED IN CLASS.

Syllabus

NO CLASSES ON MON., SEPT. 25TH and MON., OCT. 16TH.

1) Sept. 1: Why Write History? Must History Have Meaning? Power of Historiography

To be distributed: On Orwell, "Who controls the past controls the future"
"On reading a primary source"

2) Sept. 8: Philosophies of History, Shapes, Teleology; Universal History

"Philosophy of History"
Daniel chapters 2, 7, 8.
Martin, "Waiting for the End" (10 pp.)

3) Sept. 11: Meanings of History in Bible & Rabbinic Teachings; Messiah, History's Utility

YH Yerushalmi, "Biblical and Rabbinic Foundations", in *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*.
Messiah in Judaism (via Wikipedia)
Baron, in "Emancipation from State & Territory", in Meyer, 321-329
David Gans, "Benefits of Studying World History", in Meyer, **ONLY** pp. 128-131.

{How do the claims of Deuteronomy about "the place that God shall choose" compare with other biblical accounts of sacrifice to God? How does the message of Deuteronomy affect the nation's self-understanding? Does II Maccabees alter the theological narrative about the Temple?}

4) Sept. 15: Sacrifice Inside/Outside the Temple: Historiography in Deuteronomy & Maccabees

Biblical Passages on Sites of Sacrifice
Biblical Passages on Kingship
"On Deuteronomy" (selections from *Wikipedia*) (4 pp.)
Maccabees II: 1-8
Nahum Sarna, "Biblical Sources on the History of the Monarchy", pp. 41-43, 47.
David Biale, "Political Ideologies of Antiquity", 27-33.

{In writing for a Roman audience, how does Josephus present the Sicarii of Masada? What are the main themes of Elazar's 2 speeches? What methodological approaches inform S.D. Cohen's challenge to Josephus' credibility?}

5) Sept. 18: Josephus's Account of the Events at Masada

Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, Selections from Book 7, chapters 8-9.
Shaye D. Cohen, "Masada: Literary Tradition, Archaeological Remains & the Credibility of Josephus"-

ONLY pp.385-386, p.392 bottom – p. 405.

6) Sept 22: The Masada Narrative in Zionist Thought

Nahman Ben Yehuda, “Masada Myth Research Puzzle”

7) Sept. 29: Perspectives on Bar Kochba in Antiquity, Rabbinic Tradition & Modern Israel

On Bar Kochba (5 pp.)

3 Oaths in the Song of Songs

David Novak on “the 3 Oaths”, pp, 94 bott.- 100 top.

Yehoshafat Harkabi, “Bar Kochba Syndrome”: P. 92 last 2 par’s – 99; 103-110.

Yael Zerubavel, “Bar Kochba’s Image in Modern Israeli Culture”

8) Oct. 2: Class Discussion:

9) Oct. 6: Unbroken Chain of Transmission [ESSAY PROMPT DISTRIBUTED]

Mishna Avot (=Ethics of the Fathers) 1:1

Amram Tropper, “Graeco-Roman Literary Context for *Avot*”

Moses Maimonides, Preface to 12th c. law code, *Mishneh Torah*. Esp. #’s 22-45.

10) Oct. 9: Recording for Posterity

Megilat Ahima’atz, pp. 60-81; 100, last par. – 102.

Yom Tov Lippman Heller, *Megilat Eyvah*

11) Oct. 20: Etiological Narratives & Archetypal Equivalents [SUBMIT ESSAY]

Elazar of Worms, on Ashkenazic settlement

Abraham Ibn Daud, on 4 Captives, “Succession of the Rabbinate”, pp. 62-68 top paragraph.

Samuel Usque, *Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel*, #’s 14, 20.

YH Yerushalmi, from *Zakhor*, pp. 36-37; p. 40 (last par.) – p. 45

12) Oct. 23: Suffering Affirms Promise of Consolation; History as Consolation

“Laughter of Rabbi Akiva”, [BT Makkot 24b]

Samuel Usque, *Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel*, #'s 21-29; pp. 253-263.

13) Oct. 27: Chronicling Crusader Massacre of Jews in 12th Century Rhineland

Chronicle of Solomon bar Simson, in Eidelberg, *Jews & Crusaders*, pp. 21-71.

14) Oct. 30: Chronicling Massacre of Jews in Poland’s Chmielnicki Uprising, 1648-9

Nathan Neta Hannover, *Abyss of Despair*, Preface, Intro, ch’s 1, 4.

15) Nov. 3: Class Discussion: Compare and Contrast the Crusade Chronicle & Abyss of Despair

16) Nov. 6: On the Causes of Jewish Suffering & the Jewish-Royal Alliance (SUBMIT ESSAY)

Joseph Ibn Verga, selections from *Shevet Yehuda*, **ONLY** 110-114.

Jeremy Cohen, *Historian in Exile: Solomon Ibn Verga*, **ONLY** pp. 150-61.

Yosef H. Yerushalmi, *Lisbon Massacre of 1506 & Royal Image in Shevet Yehuda*, p. 37, last par. – p. 52

{What sentiments frame and characterize the Jewish reports of SZ’s activities? The Christian reports?}

17) Nov. 10: Contemporaneous Reports on Sabbetai, 17th c. Jewish False Messiah

David Halperin, Introduction, *Sabbetai Zevi: Testimonies to a False Messiah*

Baruch of Arezzo, in Halperin, pp. 38-61.

Matt Goldish, “Christian Reports”, *Sabbatean Prophets*, pp. 151-161.

18) Nov. 13: Enlightenment Belief in Progress & the Hegelian Turn in 19th c. Jewish Historiography

Hegel’s Philosophy of History (2 pp.)

Jay Harris, “Krochmal’s Theory of History”, pp. **ONLY** pp. 113-129.

Nahman Krochmal in Meyer, *Ideas of Jewish History*, pp. 189-190, 201

19) Nov. 17: Comparing Jewish History with Histories of Other Nations

Isaac Marcus Jost, “Rigors of Jewish Historiography”, Meyer, *Ideas of Jewish History*, pp.175-186.

Abraham Geiger, in Meyer, *Ideas of Jewish History*, pp. 161-172.

Simon Dubnow, “Sociological View of Jewish History”, Meyer, *Ideas of Jewish History*, pp. 259-69.

20) Nov. 20: Periodizing Jewish History

Michael Meyer, "When Does the Modern Period of Jewish History Begin?"

21) Nov. 27: Remembering the Holocaust & Holocaust Historiography

Idit Gil, "Shoah in Israeli Collective Memory"

Dan Michman, "Characteristics of Holocaust Historiography", **ONLY** pp. 213-221.

22) Dec. 1: Uses of Holocaust in US and Israel

Shaul Magid, "Holocaust and Jewish Identity in America"

Rona Sheramy, "From Auschwitz to Jerusalem: March of the Living"

Prayer for the Welfare of the State of Israel

23) Dec. 4: CLASS DISCUSSION: Multiple Perspectives on the Six Day War of June, 1967

Laron, "Debates over the 6 Day War"

Sigal Samuel, "Six Day War's Impact on Religion: 6 Perspectives", 6/2017

Al Jazeera on Six Day War, 6/2018

Mordecai Bar-On, "Six Days- Cleavages in Israeli's View of Their History" (2018)

US State Department on 6 Day War

6 Day War in the Soviet Archives

24) Dec. 8: Student Presentations

25) Dec. 11: Student Presentations