

MEDIEVAL JEWISH HISTORY

(HIST 3983)

Instructor: Prof. Stillman
Assistant: Mr. Nathan Ruhl

Spring 2012

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is a wide-ranging survey of Jewish History from the fall of the Second Temple to the Expulsion from Christian Spain. It is difficult to accommodate the Jews to conventional historical rubrics, and this will not be a conventional history course. It cannot be. There was no medieval Jewish state or territory. Jews lived in radically different societies, each with its own life-style and its own world view. In spite of this, they formed an extended nation without borders.

The primary emphasis of this course will be on the medieval Jewish communities of the Islamic *oikoumene* (a little over half the lectures). The Jews of the Latin or Catholic West will be granted next priority. Byzantine Jewry will only be briefly treated.

Because medieval Jewish civilization is multifaceted, we must approach it in different ways, always trying to understand it on its own terms. To do this, we shall give some attention to economic, social and - where applicable -- political life and evolution. There will be assigned readings in translation from some of the major creative works of this period in order that each person in the class might make some personal contact with the medieval Jewish mind. There will also be readings (again in translation) from both Jewish and non-Jewish historical sources so that we can gain some idea how Jews and Gentiles viewed each other and themselves. It is hoped that each participant will be able to heighten his or her consciousness vis-a-vis this period which saw the veritable crystallization and formulation of Judaism as we now know it today.

CLASSES

The class will meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:00 to 1:15, in Kaufman Hall 138, beginning Tuesday, January 17. The format will combine lecture and discussion. Students should feel free to ask questions of the instructor. He will feel free to ask questions of them. There will also be a film dramatization of the Disputation of Barcelona which will be shown in class and which is to be considered in the same category as a lecture and required reading.

DETERMINATION OF GRADES

Grades will be determined on the basis of a midterm examination which will be given on Thursday, March 1 (part will be taken in class with blue books and part will be given as a take-home exam to be brought back to class on Tuesday, March 6), and a final take-home exam which will be handed out on the last day of class, Thursday, May 3, and will be due back on Monday, May 7 in KH 138 (our classroom) at 1:30. Both exams will be straight-forward (nothing designed to be tricky or confusing) and will be based on the material covered in the lectures, readings, and discussions. The

exams will consist of several broad, interpretive essays (but please, no bullshit) and some identifications requiring three or four sentences each. There will be a generous element of choice in both sections of each exam. The two exams will be weighted equally (each accounting for 40% of the final course grade). There will also be a book report (ca. 5 pages) which will count for 20% of the course grade. A list of acceptable books will be posted on Desire2Learn. The book report will be due by Thursday, April 5.

INCOMPLETES

Incompletes will be granted to students only for extremely urgent reasons (mainly medical) and only to those who have taken and passed the midterm. Please note that trips to Florida or Europe are *not* extremely urgent reasons. No midterm or failed midterm + no final = F.

OFFICE HOURS

Because Dale Hall Tower has been evacuated for repairs, the Judaic Studies and History Offices are in the old Naval Bldg. on Constitution Avenue next to the University Golf Course. Since this not convenient for many students, Professor Stillman will meet with them by appointment on campus. We encourage you to make appointments to meet. It is an excellent way for us to get to know you individually. You do not have to have a problem or a complaint to come. You may simply wish to discuss some aspect of the course or even something that is not directly related to the course.

Professor Stillman's office tel. is 325-6508). His e-mail is nstillman@ou.edu.
Mr. Ruhl's e-mail is nvruhl@ou.edu

REQUIRED BOOKS

R. Chazan, *Church, State, and Jew in the Middle Ages*
S. Grayzel, *A History of the Jews* (on reserve)
N.A. Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands*
K. Stow, *Alienated Minority* (will arrive mid-course for use during the second half)
F.E. Talmage, *Disputation and Dialogue*
S.D. Goitein, *Jews and Arabs* (on reserve)
Saadya Gaon, *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*
Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World and *Encyclopaedia Judaica* - copies may be consulted in Bizzell and online. There is also a copy in the Judaic Studies office.

TOPICS

1. Introduction: The Problem of Jewish History
Read: Grayzel, pp. 179-181
2. Background: The Foundations of Medieval Jewish Existence (The Rabbis, the Mishna, and the Talmud)
Read: Grayzel, pp. 169-178; 181-195; 216-224

UNIT I: THE ISLAMIC WORLD

3. The Rise of Islam: Muhammad and the Jews
Read: Stillman, pp. 3-21 and 113-121
Goitein, pp. 46-60
4. The Muslim Conquests and the New World Order
Read: Stillman, pp. 22-28 and 153-170
Goitein, pp. 62-71 and 89-99
5. The Medieval Jewish Community: Structure & Organization (Internationally, Nationally and on the Local Level)
Read: Stillman, pp. 29-39; 171-182; 195; 252-254
Goitein, pp. 120-124
6. The Hellenistic Renaissance: Judaism meets Rationalism
Read: Goitein, pp. 125-148
Stillman, pp. 226-228
7. Free Thinking, Sectarianism, and Revolt: Hiwi ha-Balkhi, Abu Isa of Isfahan, The Karaites
Read: *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World* under the appropriate entry for each (in the reference section of the Library)
Goitein, pp. 172-176
8. Saadya Gaon: The Renaissance Man
Read: *The Book of Doctrines & Beliefs*
9. The Rise of Mediterranean Jewry: The Sages of Qayrawan

10. Read: Stillman, pp. 40-46
Spain: The Unique Culture
Read: Stillman, pp. 53-63 and 210-225
Goitein, pp. 115-167
11. Judah ha-Levi: The Rejection of Andalusian Culture

Read: *The Kuzari*
12. The Almohad Trauma: The Beginning of the Great Decline

Read: *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World* entry Almohads
13. Maimonides: The Last Great Medieval Genius

Read: Stillman, pp. 233-250
Goitein, pp. 144-148 and 180-184
Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World entries Maimonidean Controversy: and
Maimonides, Moses@
14. The Long Twilight: The Jews of the Muslim under Mongols, Mamluks, and Middle
Eastern Feudalism

Read: Stillman, pp. 64-87 and 262-287

UNIT II: THE LATIN CHRISTIAN WORLD

15. The Church Fathers and the Jews: Who is the Real Israel?

Read: Grayzel, pp. 131-136; 148-150; 198-200; 257-258; 267-274
Talmage, pp. 5-7; 17-32; 92-99;
Chazan, pp. 20-26; 29
Stow, pp. 1-40
16. Before the Crusades: Jewish Life and Culture in the first Half of the Christian Middle
Ages

Read: Grayzel, pp. 274-287
Chazan, pp. 57-63
Stow, pp. 41-101 and 157-209
17. Rashi: The Dominant Personality of Ashkenazi Jewry

- Read: Grayzel, pp. 287-290
Stow, pp. 135-156
18. The Crusades and their Aftermath: The Relationship Sours
- Read: Grayzel, pp. 303-319
Chazan, pp. 113-114 and 133-142
Stow, pp. 102-120
19. The Fourth Lateran Council: The Jew is Pariah
- Read: Chazan, pp. 34-35 and 43-51
Stow, pp. 210-280
20. The Jew as Demon: Blood Libels, Host Desecration and Assorted Horror Stories
- Read: Grayzel, pp. 314-316 and 341-352
Chazan, pp. 114-117; 123-128; 142-148; 151-157; 163-165; 301-306
21. Disputations: On the Defensive
- Read: Talmage, pp. 82-91
Grayzel, pp. 321-323; 329-330; 357-358
Chazan, pp. 241-276
Stow, pp. 251-267
22. Expulsions and the Movement East
- Read: Grayzel, pp. 317-319; 342-344; 351; 388-392
Chazan, pp. 309-319
Stow, pp. 281-308
23. Christian Spain in the Age of the Reconquista: The Curious Exception
- Read: Grayzel, pp. 331-356
Chazan, pp. 69-75; 126-131; 190-195
24. The Spanish Inquisition: The True Dawn of Modern Times
- Read: Grayzel, pp. 356-367
Chazan, pp. 319-322