

## THE TALMUDIC STORY: AGGADAH AS HISTORY

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This course examines attitudes, personalities, institutions, and events described in rabbinic compilations, especially the Bavli, between the second and seventh centuries CE. The course also examines the ways in which stories about the rabbis provide (or do not provide) useful historical or biographical information. Historians and literary critics have approached the material in a variety of ways, ranging from acceptance of Talmudic stories as reliable evidence once miraculous elements and later editorial accretions have been removed, to total denial of their validity as sources for history, viewing them purely as works of art or as hagiography. This course examines several representative approaches in an effort to determine which go furthest in explaining the evidence.

Students are expected to enter each class having carefully prepared the primary sources together with assigned secondary sources. All of the assigned secondary sources are or will soon be on reserve, or will be distributed to you as PDF files. Texts will be analyzed line by line in class only when students have specific questions or difficulties or when I feel some specific purpose will be filled by doing so. Most of the class time will be spent discussing the assigned texts in a manner which presupposes understanding of their plain, contextual meaning.

Grades: Grades are based on the following:

Class participation (40%) This will be evaluated based on students' preparation of and ability to discuss intelligently primary texts and selected secondary literature. **It is up to the student to make an appointment with me to ensure that your perception of the quality of your class participation corresponds to mine.** Please be advised that if you do not make such an appointment, you may be in for a rude surprise at the end of the semester. We want to make every effort to ensure that this does not take place.

Short papers (20%) Every four weeks students will submit a short paper (no more than 2-3 pages) featuring critical engagement with a relevant primary source. Depending on the size of the class there may be presentations in class.

Research paper (40%) One formal research project, approximately 20 double-spaced pages, that focuses upon a topic relevant to the course, is due at the end

of the semester. In consultation with the instructor, the student should select a topic that permits extended analysis.

## ASSIGNMENTS:

### I. Introduction:

1. Bavli Gittin 58a
2. Bavli Baba Mezia 84a
3. Yonah Fraenkel, *Darkhei ha-Aggadah ve-ha-Midrash*, pp. 235-85. Read during the course of the semester.

### II. Persians (part 1)

1. Bavli Yoma 10a, from 16 lines from the bottom of the page until 7 lines from the bottom.
2. Igeret Rav Sherira Gaon, ed. Benjamin Lewin, p. 97.
3. Bavli Gittin 16b-17a, from 7 lines from the bottom of 16b until 8 lines from the top of 17a.
4. Mary Boyce, ed. and trans., *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 61-65, 84-96, and 112-14.
5. Yaakov Elman, "Middle Persian Culture and Babylonian Sages: Accommodation and Resistance in the Shaping of Rabbinic Legal Tradition," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, pp. 165-97.

### Persians (part 2)

6. Bavli Yevamot 63b, from 27 lines from the top of the page until 18 lines from the bottom.
7. Bavli Moed Katan 26a, from the top of the page until 6 lines from the top, and from 19 lines from the top of the page until 27 lines from the top.

### III. Christians (part 1)

1. Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 10:2 (28b-c).

2. Bavli Yevamot 49b-50a, from 8 lines from the top of 49b until 10 lines from the top of 50a/
3. Bavli Sanhedrin 103b, from 18-19 lines from the top of the page until 27 lines from the top.
4. The Ascension of Isaiah, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James Charlesworth, pp. 156-64.

5. *The Acts of Sharbil*, ed. and trans. William Cureton, *Ancient Syriac Documents* (1864; Reprint. Amsterdam: Oriental Press, 1967), pp. 58-60 (the Syriac text is on pp. 59-61).

6. Gary G. Porton, "Isaiah and the Kings: The Rabbis on the Prophet Isaiah," in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition*, ed. Craig C. Broyles, vol. 2, pp. 693-716.

#### IV. Christians (part 2)

1. Tosefta Hullin 2:20-24 (Zuckerman edition).
2. Bavli Avodah Zarah 16b-17a, from 6 lines from the bottom of 16b until 15 lines from the top of 17a.
3. Bavli Avodah Zarah 27b, from 10 lines from the top of the page until 21 lines from the top.
4. Bavli Avodah Zarah 4a, from 18 lines from the bottom of the page until 8 lines from the bottom of the page.
5. Bavli Shabbat 116a-b, with (a) Sifrei Numbers, ed. H.S. Horowitz, Piska 131, p. 173; (b) Pesikta de-Rav Kahana, ed. Bernard Mandelbaum, vol. 1, pp. 260-62; and Burton Visotzky, "Overturning the Lamp," in *Fathers of the World*, pp. 75-84.
- 6) Aphrahat, *Demonstrations* (selections), trans. Jacob Neusner, pp. 60-83.

#### V. Christians (part 3)

7. Mishnah Shabbat 12:4, with (a) Tosefta Shabbat 11:15; (b) Yerushalmi Shabbat 12:4 (13d), from *ha-roshem al ha-or* until *pikchin*; and (c) Bavli Shabbat

104b, from 27 lines from the bottom of the page until 23 lines from the bottom.  
Continue on in the manuscript versions.

8. Origen, *Contra Celsum*, I:28 and I:32. Trans. by Henry Chadwick, pp. 26-38.

9. Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, pp. 1-24 (plus notes) and 95-129 (plus notes).

10. Bavli Kiddushin 81b, from 8 lines from the top of the page until 26 lines from the top.

11. Shlomo Naeh, "Freedom and Celibacy: A Talmudic Variation on Tales of Temptation and Fall in Genesis and its Syrian Background," in J. Fridman and L. V. Rompay, eds., *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretation: A Collection of Essays* (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), pp. 73-89.

#### VI. Christians (part 4)

1) Bavli Megillah 8b-9a (Do the second mishnah on 8b; then from the 3<sup>rd</sup> line from the bottom of 8b until 8 lines from the top of 9b), with Yerushalmi Megillah 1:8 (71d), from *Shelosh-Asar Davar* until *le-Umot le-Avdam*.

2) Mogens Müller, *The First Bible of the Church*, pp. 46-67.

#### VII. Christians (part 5)

1. Pesikta de-Rav Kahana, ed. Bernard Mandelbaum, pp. 257-58.

2. Bavli Sanhedrin 96b, from 25 lines from the top of the page until 19 lines from the bottom of the page.

3. Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985), pp. 103-11.

#### VIII. Christians (part 6)

1. Bavli Meilah 17a-b

2. Genesis Rabba 60:8, ed. Theodor and Albeck, p. 650.

3. Genesis Rabba 45:7, ed. Theodor and Albeck, p. 455.

#### IX. Magicians

- 1) Bavli Gittin 68a-b
- 2) "The Testament of Solomon," trans. and intro. By D.C. Duling, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, ed. James H. Charlesworth, pp. 960-87.

#### X. Astrologers

1. Bavli Shabbat 156a-b, from 23 lines from the top of 156a until the mishnah on 156b.

2. Jeffrey Rubenstein, "Talmudic Astrology: Bavli Shabbat 156a-b," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 78 (2007), pp. 109-48.

#### X. Sadducees and Pharisees

1. Bavli Kiddushin 66a, from 24-25 lines from the top of the page until 4 lines from the bottom.

2. Bavli Berakhot 28b-29a, from 2 lines from the bottom of 28b until 20 lines from the top of 29a.

3. Josephus, War 1.61-70.

4. Josephus, Antiquities 13.288-300.

5. Bavli Baba Batra 115b-116a, from 3 lines from the top of 115b until 4 lines from the top of 116a, with (a) Bavli Menahot 65a-b, from 20 lines from the bottom of 65a until 8 lines from the top of 65b; (b) Yerushalmi Baba Batra 8:1 (16a), from *Ha-Tzedukim* until *mi-koach ha-zaken*; (c) Tosefta Yadayim 2:20; (d) *Megillat Taanit*, ed. Noam, pp. 165-79 and 223-25.

6. Günter Stemberger, *Jewish Contemporaries of Jesus*, pp. 38-66.

7. Steve Mason, *Flavius Josephus on the Pharisees*, pp. 213-45.

#### XII. Hasmoneans

1. Bavli Kiddushin 70a-b, from 20 lines from the bottom of 70a until 21 lines from the bottom of 71b, with Josephus, Antiquities 13.288-300.

2. Mishnah Sanhedrin 2:2, with (a) Bavli Sanhedrin 19a-b, from 7 lines from the bottom of 19a until 7 lines from the top of 19b; and (b) Josephus, Antiquities 14.177-184.

3. Bavli Baba Batra 3b-4a, from 18-19 lines from the top of 3b until 23-24 lines from the top of 4a, with (a) Sifrei Deuteronomy, ed. Finkelstein, p. 271 and notes on line 13; (b) Josephus, Jewish War 1.431-444; and (c) Josephus, Antiquities 15.62-87 and 15.202-242.

4. Shaye Cohen, "Parallel Traditions in Josephus and Rabbinic Literature," in *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (1986), Division B, vol. 1, pp. 7-14.

5. Richard Kalmin, *The Sage in Jewish Society of Late Antiquity*, pp. 61-67 and 135-38.

### XIII. Dream Interpreters

1. Bavli Berakhot 55a-56b, from 9 lines from the bottom of 55a until 25 lines from the top of 56b.

2. Yerushalmi Ma'aser Sheni 4:9, from *Had bar Nash ata legabei de-R. Yosi bar Halafta* until *Lakh kupad sagi*.

3. Holger Zellentin, *Rabbinic Parodies of Jewish and Christian Literature* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2011).

### XIV. Summary and Conclusions