

# Hebrew Literature of the Middle Ages and Renaissance (NEJS 179a)

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This course is an exploration of major Hebrew authors of poetry and fiction from Byzantine Palestine, Islamic Iraq, Islamic Spain, Christian Spain, Germany, France and Italy. We will be studying liturgical works, poems for personal contemplation, and poems on secular themes written for purposes of entertainment. Students will learn about literary trends, compare Hebrew texts with contemporary non-Jewish literature, and select topics in literary theory. The syllabus below is tentative and may be overly optimistic. We will have opportunities to explore further directions of interest to students. We will be devoting approximately half of our class time to reading texts in the original Hebrew.

## **Books for purchase**

Raymond Scheindlin, *The Gazelle*

Raymond Scheindlin, *Wine, Women and Death*

Jonathan P. Decter, *Iberian Jewish Literature: Between al-Andalus and Christian Europe*

Peter Cole, *The Dream of the Poem*

## **Requirements and Evaluation**

There are 2 short papers and one longer research paper.

**Short papers** (each worth 25% of final grade) – Each short paper (3-4 pages) should be an analysis/response to a specific primary text that we read in class. Your goal is to offer a close reading that shows engagement with the text. Support your reading with textual references.

**Long paper** (40% of final grade) – This is a research paper (10 pages) in which you may pursue a topic of your choice. You may choose to expand upon a subject that we cover in class (literary or philosophical) or develop your own topic. Research topics must be discussed with the professor.

**Class participation** (10% of final grade) – You are expected to come to class well prepared and ready to discuss topics for the day and general themes of the course. Preparation of Hebrew texts is essential.

## Other Policies

**Academic Honesty** You must complete all assignments alone. In your writing, you must follow rules of attribution, meaning that you must cite all sources consulted in preparing your papers. As stated in the *Student Handbook*, “Every member of the University community is expected to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty. A student shall not receive credit for work that is not the product of the student’s own effort.” Examples of penalties for a student found responsible for an infringement of academic honesty are no credit for the work in question, failure in the course, and the traditional range of conduct sanctions from disciplinary warning through permanent dismissal from the University.

**Students with documented disabilities:** Students with disabilities certified by the Coordinator of Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities in the Office of Undergraduate Academic Affairs and First Year Services will be given reasonable accommodations to complete required assignments. Disabilities that are not documented and approved by the Office of Academic Affairs will not be given accommodations.

**Late Assignments:** Papers submitted late will suffer a 1/3 grade deduction per day late. For example, a paper that would have received a grade of A on the assigned date would receive an A minus if submitted one day late, a B plus if submitted two days late, and so on.

## *Schedule of Assignments (tentative)*

### Introduction

#### I. **Classical Piyyut**

Petuchowski, *Theology and Poetry: Studies in the Medieval Piyyut*, pp. 11-19, 84-110 (course packet)

Ophir Munz Manor, “All About Sarah: Questions of Gender in Yannai’s Poems on Sarah’s (and Abraham’s) Barrenness” (Latte)

T. Carmi, *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse*, pp. 209-32 (course packet)

Selections from High Holiday Liturgy (Silverman 61-62, 256-57) (course packet)

Michael Swartz and Joseph Yahalom, *Avodah: An Anthology of Ancient Poetry for Yom Kippur* (introduction and chapter one) (Latte)

#### II. **Hebrew Poetry in Iraq, 10<sup>th</sup> century**

Joseph Tobi, “Saadia Gaon: Poet Paytan: The Link Between the Ancient Piyyut and the Arabicised Poetry of the East” (Latte)

Carmi, 253-74 (course packet)

III. **Jewish Literature in al-Andalus**

Jonathan Decker, "Literatures of Medieval Sepharad" (Latte)

Ross Brann, *The Compunctious Poet*, chapter 1 (Latte)

Raymond Scheindlin, *The Gazelle*

Raymond Scheindlin, *Wine, Women and Death*

Dan Pagis, "Individuality and the Poetic Tradition" (Latte)

Peter Cole, *Dream of the Poem*, part I

Tova Rosen, *Unveiling Eve*, ix-102

Samuel Stern, "Arabic Poems by Spanish Hebrew Poets" (Latte)

Jonathan Decker, "IbrÁhÐm Ibn al-FakhkhÁr al-YahÙdÐ: An Arabic Poet a

Diploma

in Castile and the Maghrib" (Latte)

IV. **Leaving al-Andalus**

Jonathan Decker, *Iberian Jewish Literature: Between al-Andalus and Christian Europe*, introduction and chapters 1-2 (Latte)

V. **Hebrew Literature in Christian Spain**

Jonathan Decker, *Iberian Jewish Literature*, chapters 4-7 (Latte)

Ross Brann, *The Compunctious Poet*, chapter 5 (Latte)

Peter Cole, *Dream of the Poem*, part II

Dan Pagis, "Variety in Medieval Rhymed Narratives" (Latte)

Solomon Ibn Saqbel, "Asher in the Harem" (in course packet)

Raymond Scheindlin, "Fawns of the Palace, Fawns of the Field" (Latte)

Judah Ibn Shabbetai, "The Misogynist" (in course packet)

Tova Rosen, "Unveiling Eve," chapter 6

Judah al-Harizi, *The Book of Tahkemoni*, selections (trans David Segal), in course packet)

Ross Brann, "Power in the Portrayal: Representations of Muslims and Jews in al-Harizi's *Tahkemoni*" (Latte)

Jacob Ben Elazar, *Book of Stories*, chapters 5,6 (course packet)

Isaac Ibn Sahula, *Tale of the Ancient One*, Selections, trans. Raphael Loewe (course packet)

VI. **Hebrew Poetry in Germany and France**

"A Hebrew-French Wedding Poem" (course packet)

Susan Einbinder, *Beautiful Death*

Carmi, 368-88 (course packet)

Shalom Spiegel, *The Last Trial* (Latte)

VII. **Hebrew Literature in Italy**

Joseph Adler, "Immanuel of Rome," *Midstream* 48,2 (2002) 16-19 (course packet)

Ann Brener, "Stealing Wisdom: A Story of Books (and Book Thieves) from Immanuel of Rome's *Mahberot*"  
Immanuel of Rome, *Compositions*, selections (in coursepacket)  
Dvora Bregmann, *The Golden Way*, chapters 1-4

### **Hebrew Texts:**

We will be reading Hebrew texts throughout the semester. I will select these once I have a stronger sense of student reading level. Your most useful Hebrew-English dictionary is the Brown, Driver and Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. It is also important to have a Hebrew Bible and/or an English-Hebrew Bible (such as *Tanakh* by the Jewish Publication Society) for looking up references. A useful Hebrew-Hebrew dictionary is *ha-Milon he-hadash* by Avraham Even-Shoshan. All of these are available in the Judaica Reference room of the library. There are other tools we will discuss during the semester.