

21H.914: Jews from Biblical to Modern Times
Fall, 2010

Time: W 1 – 3

Professor Peter Temin

This subject provides a comprehensive overview of Jewish history from Biblical times to today. The discussion will focus on two questions. First, how do we “know” what we think we know of Jewish history? This of course is a central question of all history. Since the subject ranges over a wide range of times and places, it is not surprising that the readings are based on a wide range of evidence. Second, how have Jews survived as a continuous ethnic/religious group? They are unique in the length of time they have existed with a continuous history. We will seek to discover what is durable about the Jewish experience that has led to this longevity

The subject uses recent scholarship in English to suggest answers to these questions. Only English is required for this subject, but there is a lot of reading and writing. Readings should be done before the relevant class to make the class discussion relevant to the comprehension of the reading and the readings relevant to the class discussion. The dates on the syllabus show when the assigned readings will be discussed; they should be read completely by those dates.

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Course Requirements

The subject requires two types of written exercises: papers and exams. Credit will be given for papers, class participation, and exams in that order.

Papers

This course requires two essays of about ten pages each, due on October 14 and December 2. The first essay will be methodological, about the methods and sources of history. It is appropriate to write this paper early in the subject because the readings on the early years reveal the most varied historical evidence. The second paper will be an attempt for each student to answer the second question of the course: Why have Jews survived as a group? The paper should also discuss each student’s relationship to a religion (whatever it may be), with attention to the long-term attractiveness of this religion as well as its current appeal. More detailed instructions for the papers will be provided in class.

Exams

There will be two exams on the readings in class time as shown on the syllabus.

Reading Assignments

Most of the required books on the reading list have been ordered at the MIT Bookstore and should be available there for purchase. All required books are on reserve at Hayden Library.

Week 1 (9/8)

Introduction, overview of the subject

Week 2 (9/15)

Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: Norton, 2004), "Genesis" and "Exodus."

Also recommended:

Jaroslav Pelikan, *Whose Bible Is It? A History of the Scriptures through the Ages* (New York: Viking, 2005)

Raymond P. Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People: from Legendary Times to Modern Statehood* (New York: Macmillan, 1998).

Week 3 (9/22)

Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed* (New York: Free Press, 2001), Prologue, Introduction and Part One, pp. 1-145.

Also recommended:

Lawrence E. Stager, "The Patrimonial Kingdom of Solomon," in William G. Dever and Seymour Gitin (eds.), *Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past: Canaan, Ancient Israel, and Their Neighbors* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), pp. 63-74.

Israel Finkelstein, *David and Solomon* (New York: Free Press, 2006).

Week 4 (9/29)

Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), Chapters 1-3, pp. 1-200.

Also recommended:

Peter Temin, "Mediterranean Trade in Biblical Times," in *Eli F. Heckscher: A Celebratory Symposium*, edited by Ronald Findlay, et al. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006).

Week 5 (10/6)

Martin Goodman, *The Ruling Class of Judaea: The Origins of the Jewish Revolt against Rome, AD 66-70* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), Introduction and Part I, pp. 1-133.

Martin Goodman, "Trajan and the Origins of Roman Hostility to the Jews," *Past and Present*, Nbr. 182 (February 2004), 3-31.

Also recommended:

Fergus Millar, "The Background to the Maccabean Revolution: Reflections on Martin Hengel's 'Judaism and Hellenism,'" *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 29 (1978), 1-21.

Bezalel Bar-Kochba, *Judas Maccabeus: The Jewish Struggle against the Seleucids* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), "Conclusion," pp. 403-09.

Andrea M. Berlin and J. Andrew Overman (eds.), *The First Jewish Revolt: Archaeology, History, and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 2002).

Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (Louisville: John Knox, 1987);

Milton Steinberg, *As a Driven Leaf* (New York: Behrman House, 1939).

David Klinghoffer, *Why the Jews Rejected Jesus: the Turning Point in Western History* (New York: Doubleday, 2005).

Week 6 (10/13) First paper due

Maristella Botticini and Zvi Eckstein, "Jewish Occupational Selection: Education, Restrictions or Minorities?" *Journal of Economic History* 65 (December 2005), 1-26.

Iil Arbel, *Maimonides: A Spiritual Biography* (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 2001).

Also recommended:

S. D. Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974).

Isadore Twersky (ed.), *A Maimonides Reader* (New York: Behrman House, 1972).

Menachem Kellner, *Must a Jew Believe Anything?* (Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 1999).

Sherwin B. Nuland, *Maimonides* (New York: Schocken, 2005).

Week 7 (10/20)

First Exam, followed by preparation for Week 8

Week 8 (10/27)

Mark R. Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

Also recommended:

Leonard B. Glick, *Abraham's Heirs: Jews and Christians in Medieval Europe* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999).

Gregory Cochran, Jason Hardy and Henry Harpending, "Natural History of Ashkenazi Intelligence," *Journal of Biosocial Science*, 38 (2005), 659-93.

Week 9 (11/3)

Amos Elon, *The Pity of It All: A Portrait of the German-Jewish Epoch, 1743-1933* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002), Introduction and Chapters 1 through 8.

I. L. Peretz, "The Shtraymel" (1894), "If Not Higher" (1900), in Ken Frieden (ed.), *Classic Yiddish Stories* (Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 2004), pp. 137-46, 163-66.

Also recommended:

Natalie Z. Davis, "Arguing with God: Glikl bas Judah Leib," in *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth-Century Lives* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 1-62.

Edward Kritzler, *Jewish Pirates of the Caribbean* (New York: Doubleday, 2008).

Week 10 (11/10)

Alexander Stille, *Benevolence and Betrayal: Five Italian Jewish Families under Fascism* (New York: Summit Books, 1991), Parts 1-3, pp. 11-222.

Also recommended:

Celia S. Heller, *On the Edge of Destruction: Jews of Poland between the Two World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Week 11 (11/24)

Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz: The Nazi Assault on Humanity* (New York: Collier, 1961).

Lucy S. Dawidowicz, "Thinking About the Six Million: Facts, Figures, Perspectives," in Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The Holocaust and the Historians* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 4-21.

Also recommended:

Eli Wiesel, *Night* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006).

Emanuel Ringelblum, *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1958).

Anne Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl*, the definitive edition (New York: Doubleday, 1995).

Victor Klemperer, *I Will Bear Witness* (New York: Random House, 1998).

Robert H. Satloff, *Among the Righteous: Lost Stories from the Holocaust's Long Reach into Arab Lands* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2006).

Week 12 (12/1) Second paper due

Benny Morris, *1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), Chapters 1-2, pp. 1-74.

Gershom Gorenberg, *The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967-1977* (New York: Times Books, 2006), Chapters 1-2, pp. 7-71.

Also recommended:

Itamar Rabinovich and Jehuda Reinharz (eds.), *Israel in the Middle East: Documents and Readings*, second edition (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2008).

Leslie Stein, *The Hope Fulfilled: The Rise of Modern Israel* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003).

Joshua D. Angrist, "Returns to Schooling in the West Bank and Gaza Strip," *American Economic Review*, 85 (December 1995).

Dan Senor and Saul Singer, *Start-Up Nation; The Story of Israel's Economic Miracle* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2009).

Week 13 (12/8)

William D. Rubenstein, "Jews in the Economic Elites of Western Nations and Anti-Semitism," *Jewish Journal of Sociology*, 42: 5-35 (2000).

Peter Temin, "An Elite Minority: Jews among the Richest 400 Americans," in David Eltis and Frank Lewis (eds.), *Human Capital in Economic Growth* (New York: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

Bruce Phillips, "American Judaism in the Twenty-First Century," in Dana Evans Kaplan (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to American Judaism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 397-415.

Also recommended:

Hasia R. Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

Andrew Godley, *Jewish Immigrant Entrepreneurship in New York and London, 1880-1914* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

Leonard G. Ross, *The Education of Hyman Kaplan* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1937).

Philip Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint* (New York: Random House, 1969).

Alan M. Dershowitz, *The Vanishing American Jew* (New York: Little Brown, 1997).

Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

Dana Evan Kaplan (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Second Exam in the exam period

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