



The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Syllabus

Between History and Folk Literature - 13812

Last update 09-12-2023

HU Credits: 4

Degree/Cycle: 2nd degree (Master)

Responsible Department: History of Jewish People & Contemporary Jewry

Academic year: 0

Semester: Yearly

Teaching Languages: Hebrew

Campus: Mt. Scopus

Course/Module Coordinator: Prof Ram Ben-Shalom Dr. David Rotman

Coordinator Email: David.rotman@mail.huji.ac.il

Coordinator Office Hours: Tue. 14:00

Teaching Staff:

Prof Ram Ben-Shalom,
Dr. David Rotman

Course/Module description:

History is the telling of the past and its delineation as narrative. This shared seminar explores the intricate connection between the substantial and methodological aspects of history and literature in general, and folk literature in particular. Folk literature, in its various genres, serves as a central avenue for expressing collective memory. Scholars from different research disciplines have long recognized the importance of this literature in elucidating questions pertaining to historical consciousness, identity, the reinforcement of shared communal foundations, both abstract and concrete, and more.

In this seminar, we aim to examine the historical-literary discourse through the analysis of Hebrew texts from the Middle Ages and the early modern period, spanning diverse genres such as chronicles, polemical works, moral literature, and belletristic works with social critique.

We will endeavor to understand the implications and roles of the intertwined stories within these compositions in the social processes that the Jewish people underwent during different periods, changing Jewish identities, education, intergenerational dialogue, and more. Additionally, we will delve into theoretical sources and studies focusing on issues related to the formation of collective memory, both in a general sense and specifically within the Jewish context, and the exploration of folk literature as a historical source, elucidating systems of connections and gaps among history, memory, identity, and narrative.

Course/Module aims:

Introduction to the theoretical and methodological aspects concerning the interplay between historical writing and literary composition.

Acquisition of skills and analytical tools for discussing Jewish literature from the Middle Ages and the early modern period, as well as textual hermeneutics.

Experience in research-oriented interpretative discussion of historical/literary composition and presentation thereof.

Learning outcomes - On successful completion of this module, students should be able to:

Analyze primary texts authored by European Western Jewish writers, focusing on their historical and literary aspects.

Recognize and comprehend key elements of the history of European Jewry and the ways it was narrated.

Gain familiarity with prominent figures among medieval European Jews and understand their cultural and intellectual worlds.

Present a classroom report on one of the course topics.

Write a thesis (either a seminar paper or a final project) on one of the seminar's subjects.

Attendance requirements(%):

100%

Teaching arrangement and method of instruction: Lectures, reading and discussing primary sources.

Course/Module Content:

1. Introduction: History and Memory
Examination of the terms "history," "historiography," "memory," "historical consciousness," "collective memory," and their connection to folk literature.
2. Historical Consciousness and Collective Memory in "Historical" Stories: Polemics, Legends, and History: Reading and analysis of two historical works from southern Italy and the issues arising from them:

Book of Yosippon (Southern Italy, mid-10th century)
Megillat Ahimaaz (Southern Italy, mid-11th century)
3. Historiography and Literature as Moral and Polemical Tools
Reading and analysis of two literary/historical works from Provence and the issues arising from them:
Letter of Jacob of Venice (Provence, 13th century)
Even Bochan and Klonimos ben Klonimos (Provence, 14th century)
4. History as Exemplary Stories: Reading and Discussion of Works by Isaac Nathan (Provence, 16th century)
Sefer Yuchasin by Abraham Zacuto (Portugal/Tunis, 16th century)
Tikvat Anavim by Elazar Shalom (Poland, 18th century)
5. Lachrymose History and the Poetics of Suffering: Reading and Analysis of Literary/Historical Works from the 16th and 17th Centuries
Shevet Yehudah by Shlomo Ibn Verga (Constantinople, mid-16th century)
Emek Habacha by Joseph Cohen (Italy, 16th century)
Yaven Metzulah by Nathan Nata Hannover (Venice, 17th century)
6. Presentation of Student Projects.

Required Reading:

- ירושלמי, י.ח. זכור : היסטוריה יהודית וזיכרון יהודי תל אביב 1988
- פונקנשטין, ע., "זיכרון קיבוצי ותודעה היסטורית", תדמית ותודעה היסטורית ביהדות ובסביבתה

- התרבותית, תל אביב, תשנ"א, 13-40
- אלעזר וינריב, חשיבה היסטורית: פרקים בפילוסופיה של היסטוריה, תל-אביב תשמ"ז, א, בעיקר עמ' 453-389
 - פלוסר, ד., ספר יוסיפון. מבוא, חילופי גרסאות, מפתחות, ירושלים תשמ"א, כרכים א-ב, בעיקר כרך א, עמ' 216-108
 - Bonfil, Robert., and Ahimaaz ben Paltiel. *History and Folklore in a Medieval Jewish Chronicle the Family Chronicle of Aḥima'az Ben Paltiel*. Leiden ;: Brill, 2009.
 - בונפיל, ר., "מיתוס, רטוריקה, היסטוריה? עיון במגילת אחימעץ", תרבות וחברה בתולדות ישראל בימי הביניים, (בעריכת מ' בן-ששון, ר' בונפיל, י' הקר), ירושלים 1989, עמ' 135-99.
 - יסיף, ע., "אגדה והיסטוריה: היסטוריונים קוראים באגדות מימי הביניים", ציון סד (תשנ"ט) 234-187
 - רוסמן, מ., "אומנות ההיסטוריוגרפיה ושיטת הפולקלור", ציון סה (תשנ"ט) 218-209
 - יסיף, ע., "אגדה והיסטוריה במחשבה שניה" (שם)
 - ספר הזכרונות הוא דברי הימים לירחמאל, מהדורת ע' יסיף, ת"א תשס"א.
 - אגרת (וכוח) ר' יעקב מוויניציאה, מהדורת קאבק, ישרון, ו (1868), עמ' 34-1.
 - הברמן, א"מ. וקלונימוס בן קלונימוס, אבן בחן. תל אביב: מחברות לספרות, 1956.
 - בן שלום, ר., מול תרבות נוצרית: תודעה היסטורית ודימויי עבר בקרב יהודי ספרד ופרובנס בימי הביניים, ירושלים תשס"ז, בעיקר עמ' 250-208, 88-1.
 - ר. בן-שלום, "נזירים ויהודים: המנדיקנטים בעיניו של יצחק נתן", זמנים, 100, 2007, עמ' 47-36.
 - אברהם זכות, ספר יוחסין, מהדורת צ' פיליפאוסקי וא"ח פריימאן, פרנקפורט תרפ"ה.
 - R. Ben-Shalom, "Anti-Christian Historiographical Polemic in Sefer Yuhasin", *Hispania Judaica Bulletin*, 13 (2017), pp. 1-42.
 - Cohen, J., *A Historian in Exile : Solomon Ibn Verga, "Shevet Yehudah," and the Jewish-Christian Encounter*. Philadelphia 2017
 - Bacon, G., "The House of Hannover": Gezeirot Tah in Modern Jewish Historical Writing." *Jewish History*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2003, pp. 179-206
 - Joseph Hakohen, *Sefer 'Emeq Ha-Bakha (the Vale of Tears) with the Chronicle of the Anonymous Corrector* (Heb. and Eng.), ed. Karin Almbladh, Uppsala, 1981.

Additional Reading Material:

Grading Scheme:

- Essay / Project / Final Assignment / Home Exam / Referat 80 %
- Presentation / Poster Presentation / Lecture/ Seminar / Pro-seminar / Research proposal 10 %
- Attendance / Participation in Field Excursion 10 %

Additional information: