A werewolf, a witch and a Rabbi… : Reading medieval Jewish Stories

Course description:

In this class we will read legends, stories, fairytales, myths, and other works of folklore culled from the Jewish Middle Ages (800-1500), with an eye to their historical value. We will grapple with the methodological challenges historians are faced with when dealing with such sources and consider a range of different approaches.

While folklorists tend to search for the universal 'motifs' in legends, and positivistic historians search for the 'historical kernel' and dismiss the 'legendary and fantastic' elements, cultural historians - armed with methodological tools adopted from the social sciences - treat folklore as an historical source pointing not only to conventional history but to psychological, mental and cultural histories as well.

Beyond introducing students to Jewish History in the Middle Ages, this class will touch upon some basic issues of modern historiography such as the place of collective memory and psychology; narrative, representation and event; fact and myth; author and readers; popular and elite cultures; and the consumption and production of culture.

Course requirements and grading:

Requirements for the course include readings (a source and an article for each class) and class participation (10%), mid-term paper (30%) and final paper (60%). Students may submit the papers in Hebrew.

Syllabus

1. Historians reading Stories: An introduction

(1) Peter Burke, "History and Folklore: A Historiographical Survey", *Folklore* 115/2 (Aug., 2004), pp. 133-139; (2) Robert Darnton, "Peasants Tell Tales: The Meaning of Mother Goose", in: Idem, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, New York l984, pp. 9-74; (3) Moshe Rosman, "Methodological Hybridity: the Art of Jewish Historiography and the Methods of Folklore" in Idem, *How Jewish is Jewish History?* (Oxford; Portland, Or., The Littman

Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007), 154-167; (4) Peter Burke, *History and social theory*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005), 101-104; (5) Ivan Marcus, "History, story and collective memory: narrativity in early Ashkenazic culture," Prooftexts 10,3 (1990) 365-388. (6) Eli Yassif, *The Hebrew Folktale: History, Genre, Meaning,* Jacqueline S. Teitelbaum (tr.) (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999) vii-xvii (forward), 1-7 (introduction), 245-250 (Middle Ages).

Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews,* H. Szold and P. Radin (trs.), 2nd ed. (Philadelphia 2003, first published 1954); Nissim ben Jacob ibn Shahin, *An Elegant Composition concerning Relief after Adversity*, W.M. Brinner (tr.), Yale 1977; Robert Bonfil, *History and Folklore in a Medieval Jewish Chronicle: The Family Chronicle of Ahima'az ben Paltiel* (Brill: Leiden & Boston, 2009).

2. Abu Aharon, the Lion and the Mule

(1) *The Cronicle of Ahimaaz*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes, by Marcus Salzman (New York 1924, 1966), 1-59; (2) Robert Bonfil, *History and Folklore in a Medieval Jewish Chronicle: The Family Chronicle of Ahima'az ben Paltiel* (Brill: Leiden & Boston, 2009), 238-245.

3. Rabbi Shephatia, the Demon and the Emperor's Daughter

The Cronicle of Ahimaaz, Translated with an Introduction and Notes, by Marcus Salzman (New York 1924, 1966), 1-59; (2) Robert Bonfil, *History and Folklore in a Medieval Jewish Chronicle: The Family Chronicle of Ahima'az ben Paltiel* (Brill: Leiden & Boston, 2009), 260-271.

4. The Pirates' four Captives

Abraham Ibn Daud, *The Book of Tradition (Sefer Ha-qabbalah) — A Critical Edition, with a Translation and Notes* by Gerson D. Cohen, Philadelphia 1967, 63-66; (2) Gerson D. Cohen, "The Story of the Four Captives", *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 29 (1960-1961), 55-131.

5.   Jesus the Magician

(1) *Toldot Jesu* http://jewishchristianlit.com//Topics/JewishJesus/toledoth.html; (2) David Biale, "Counter-history and Jewish polemics against Christianity: the "Sefer Toldot Yeshu" and the "Sefer Zerubavel", *Jewish Social Studies* 6,1 (1999): 130-145

6.   The Ten Lost Tribes, Gog and Magog and the Mongols

(1) Nathan Adler, *Jewish Travelers,* London 1930, pp. 4-21; (2) Jacques Le Goff, "The Medieval West and the Indian Ocean: An Oneiric Horizon", in: Idem, *Time, Work, & Culture in the Middle Ages*, Arthur Goldhammer (tr.) Chicago & London 1980, pp. 189-200; (3) Sophia Menache, "Tartars, Jews, Saracens and the Jewish-Mongol 'Plot' of 1241", *History* 81 (1996) 319-342.

7. A Journey to Heaven and Hell

(1) R. Joshua Ben Levi's Journey to Heaven and Hell. In: S. P. Raphael, *Jewish Views of the Afterlife,* 188-192, 182-184 (in this order); (2) Jacques Le Goff, "The Learned and Popular Dimensions of Journeys in the Otherworld in the Middle Ages", in: *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century,* S.L. Kaplan (ed.), (New Babylon: Studies in the Social Sciences 40, Berlin, New York, Amsterdam 1984), pp. 19-37; (3) *Visions of Heaven & Hell Before Dante,* E. Gardiner (ed.), New York 1989; (4) A.Y. Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception,* J.M. Bak and P.A. Hollingsworth (trs.), Cambridge 1988, pp. 104-152 (=Ch. IV: "The *Divine Comedy* before Dante")

8. The Werewolf, Witch and Rabbi

(1) Yehudah HeChasid, *Sefer Chasidim: the book of the pious*, A.Y. Finkel (tr.) (New Jersey 1997); (2) Ivan Marcus, "Images of the Jews in the 'Exempla' of Caesarius of Heisterbach", In: *From Witness to Witchcraft* (1996), 247-256; (3) Idem, "History, Story and Collective Memory: Narrativity in Early Ashkenazic Culture", *Prooftexts* 10,3 (1990): 365-388 [Reprint in: *The*

Midrashic Imagination; Jewish Exegesis, Thought, and History. Ed. by Michael Fishbane, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 255-279].

9. Amnon of Mainz and his Dismantled Fingers

(1) Ivan Marcus, "A Pious Community and Doubt: Qiddush ha-Shem in Ashkenaz and the Story of Rabbi Amnon of Mainz", *Studien zur jüdischen Geschichte und Soziologie* (1992), 97-113

10. Eliazar under the Elephant, Pharaoh under the Door and three Jewish St. Peters

(1) Bekkum, Wout Jacques van, "The rock on which the Church is founded': Simon Peter in Jewish folktale", In: *Saints and Role Models in Judaism and Christianity*, (2004) 289-310; (2) Idem, "The poetical qualities of the Apostle Peter in Jewish folktale", In: *Zutot* 3 (2003), 16-25

11. Passion of the Christ and other Passions

(1) Gautier de Coincy, *Miracles of Virgin Mary,* "(2.) Of a Jewish child who converted to the Christian faith", In: *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology,* Thomas Head (ed.) (Garland: NY, 2000), 634-636; (2) Martha Bayless, "The Story of the fallen Jew and the Iconography of Jewish Unbelief", *Viator* 34 (2003): 142-156; (3) Ivan Marcus, "Images of the Jews in the "Exempla" of Caesarius of Heisterbach," *From Witness to Witchcraft; Jews and Judaism in Medieval Christian Thought,* Jeremy Cohen (ed.) (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1996), 247-256 (4) Israel Jacob Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, trs. Barbara Harshav and Jonathan Chipman (Berkeley 2006), 159-204.

12. A married wife seduces the Rabbi

(1) Nissim ben Jacob ibn Shahin, *An Elegant Composition concerning Relief after Adversity*, W.M. Brinner (tr.), Yale 1977, Ch. XXV, pp. 118-120 (R. Meir and the Perfidious Women); [(2) Ch. XXVII, pp. 127-146 (Nathan ben Susita)]

(13). Alexander Macedon in India

Drukker, Tamar S., "A thirteenth-century Arthurian tale in Hebrew: a unique literary exchange," *Medieval Encounters* 15,1 (2009) 114-129.
Needler, Howard, "The medieval Jewish writer as European satirist," *Transversal: Zeitschrift für Jüdische Studien* 7,2 (2006) 7-17.
Bekkum, Wout Jacques van, "Medieval Hebrew versions of the Alexander Romance," *Mediaeval Antiquity*. Edited by Andries Welkenhuysen (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1995), 293-302.
Haim *Schwarzbaum*, *The Mishle shualim (fox fables) of Rabbi Berechiah ha-Nakdan: A study in comparative folklore and fable lore* (Kiron, Israel, 1979).
Immanuel ben Jacob Bonfils, *Toldot Aleksandros ha-Makdoni* (Medieval Academy of America; Cambridge, Mass., 1962), 133-158 (#98-130) [Hebrew version of the Alexandrian cycle]
Dan, Joseph, "Hebrew Versions of Medieval Prose Romances", *Hebrew University Studies in Literature and the Arts* 6:1 (1978), 1-9