

## **RABBIS AND JUDAISM IN LATE ANTIQUITY**

Lecturer/co-ordinator: Dr Sacha Stern

Credit value: 1 unit

Degrees: BA Jewish History, BA History and Jewish Studies (years 3-4); MA Hebrew and Jewish Studies

Course code: HEBR7760, HEBRG070

Academic year: 2009/10

### **Course description**

The purpose of this course is historical; it concerns the rabbinic movement and the rise of rabbinic Judaism in late Antiquity. The earliest evidence of rabbinic Judaism dates from the end of the 2nd century CE, when the Mishnah was redacted, but the Mishnah cites rabbinic teachings from the early 1st century CE. This was followed by other rabbinic texts, including most famously the Talmud Yerushalmi, the Talmud Bavli, and the Midrashim, that were to become the foundation of normative Judaism until this very day.

In this course, we shall investigate the early origins of the rabbinic movement, how it was initially confined to Jerusalem and Judea, and how it then expanded to Galilee and, by the 3rd century, to Babylonia. We shall examine the socio-political conditions of Jews and rabbis in Roman Palestine and in Persian Babylonia; the nature and leadership of the rabbinic movement; the status of the patriarchs (*nesi'im*), exilarch, and the yeshivot; and the complex relationship between the Palestinian and the Babylonian rabbinic communities. One of the central questions that will be raised is why and how rabbinic literature came into being, and why in this particular period of Jewish history.

### **Requirements and assessment**

Admission to this course is open to students with basic knowledge of Hebrew. Knowledge of Aramaic, and awareness of rabbinic literature, are advantages but not essential. Most texts will be supplied with translations.

The course will comprise two hours of lectures per week, over a total of 22 weeks (the last two weeks will be for revision). Lectures will take place in Cruciform B.02 on Mondays at 11 – 1:00, starting from 5 October 2009.

*MA students will also attend a seminar, one hour fortnightly.*

BA Students are required to submit two 3000-word essays, the first on the first Friday of term 2 and the second on the last day of term 2 (see further below). Essays count towards 50% of the total mark for the course. The remaining 50% will be assessed by a three-hour exam in term 3.

*MA assessment requirements are the same, except that essays are 4000-word long and count for 40% of the total mark for the course. In addition, MA students must make an oral presentation at the MA seminar that counts for 10% of the total mark.*

*JYA students taking the entire course will be assessed as BA students. JYA students taking only one term will be assessed with one 5000-word essay only.*

### Essay questions

The questions below apply to both essays, but in broad terms, essay (1) should focus on the Tannaitic period, and essay (2) on the Amoraic.

Students are encouraged to write essays on more specific topics, but only in consultation with the lecturer and with his/her approval.

1. Assess the historical context of the rise and development of the rabbinic movement.
2. Discuss the nature of rabbinic leadership *either* before Rabbi (Yehuda ha-Nasi) *or* under Rabbi *or* under his successors.
3. Assess the importance of rabbinic Judaism within Judaeon/Palestinian society *either* in the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE *or* in the Tannaitic period *or* in the Amoraic period.
4. Discuss the historical and literary issues regarding the rise and formation of rabbinic literature.
5. Discuss the relationship between the Palestinian and Babylonian rabbinic communities.
6. Assess the value of rabbinic sources as historical evidence.

Please note that essays must conform to the Departmental Style Sheet.

### **Programme of lectures**

The course will be taught by lectures (20 x 2 hours) and revision sessions (2 x 2 hours). The list of lecture topics to be taught is as follows (*the number in brackets indicates the number of 2-hour lectures allocated to each topic*):

1. Introduction: rabbinic Judaism. (1)  
Rabbinic Judaism: definition, origins. The 'rabbi'.
2. Early origins: from the Great Assembly to Hillel. (1)
3. Pharisees, *haverim*, scribes, and 1<sup>st</sup>-century Judaism. (1)  
Were 1<sup>st</sup>-century religious groups the forerunners of rabbinic Judaism?
4. R.Yohanan b.Zakkai, R.Gamaliel, and the 'end' of the 1<sup>st</sup> century sects. (2)  
Early rabbinic leadership. The significance of Yavneh. Rabbinic and other responses to the destruction of the Temple.
5. The Bar-Kokhba revolt and its aftermath. (2)

Outline of events. Were rabbis involved? Aftermath: the ‘migration’ to Galilee. The significance of Usha. The end of messianism?

6. R. Yehuda ha-Nasi and the Patriarchate. (1)  
R. Yehuda ha-Nasi’s status in the rabbinic movement and in wider society. The origins of the Patriarchate.
7. The redaction of the Mishna. (1)  
Redaction: oral or written? Authorship, reception. Why did rabbinic literature take shape in this period?
8. Methodological excursus: rabbinic literature as a historical source. (2)  
General considerations. The historical value of (a) aggadic narrative and (b) halakhic rulings.
9. Roman Palestine in the Amoraic period. (1).  
The 3<sup>rd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> centuries: Constantine and Christianisation; the revolt under Gallus; the reign of Julian; imperial legislation relating to the Jews.
10. The Palestinian rabbinic movement in the Amoraic period. (3)  
The Patriarchs. Rabbinic authority in Palestine. Palestinian synagogues and other archeological remains. Hellenization, Christianization, synagogues, priests, and rabbinic Judaism.
11. Palestinian rabbinic (post-Mishnaic) literature. (2).  
Tosefta. Palestinian Talmud. Halakhic Midrash. Aggadic Midrash.
12. The Babylonian rabbinic movement. (2)  
The Tannaitic period. Rav and Shemuel. Amoraic sayings and activity. The rise of the ‘yeshivot’. Relations between Babylonia and Palestine. Rabbinic authority in Babylonia.
13. The Jews in Persian Babylonia. (1)  
The impact of Sassanian rule. The exilarch.
14. The Babylonian Talmud. (1)  
Authorship and ‘date’ of redaction. Comparison with Palestinian Talmud (style, contents).
15. Diaspora Jews in late Antiquity. (2)  
Diaspora Judaism (synagogues, inscriptions). Rabbis and *apostoloi* in the Diaspora (excluding Babylonia). Rabbinic influence on the Diaspora and the spread of rabbinic Judaism.
16. Revision. (2)

*The MA Seminar (additional to the lectures) will be based on student presentations on a selection of essential modern scholarly works.*

## **Reading list**

Students must supplement the lectures with their own reading. This is a compulsory requirement, in addition to reading undertaken specifically for preparation of essays.

The list below is for general reading purposes. Other, more specialized readings will be necessary for preparation of essays.

Students are not expected to read the entire list below, but to make a selection based on their own interests. However, books marked with a \* are essential and students should make themselves familiar with these.

Further advice can be obtained from the lecturer.

### 1. The Jews in late Antiquity: general works.

\* E.Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.- A.D. 135)*, revised and edited by G.Vermees and F.Millar (and M.Black (vols.I-II), M.Goodman (vols.III.1-2)), 4 vols., Edinburgh: T.& T.Clark, 1973-87.

\* S. T. Katz (ed.). *The Cambridge History of Judaism, vol. 4: The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

P.Schäfer, *The History of the Jews in Antiquity*, 1995.

L.Grabbe, *Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian*, vol.2 (the Roman period), Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.

S. Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 BCE to 640 CE*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

L.H.Schiffman, *Texts and Traditions. A Source Reader for the Study of Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism*, Hoboken NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 1998.

### 2. Jews and rabbis of Palestine.

E.M.Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule*, Leiden: Brill, 1976.

M.Avi-Yonah, *The Jews under Roman and Byzantine Rule*, Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1984 (also

published under other titles).

\* G. Alon, *The Jews in their Land in the Talmudic Age*, Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1980-4 (2 vols.) (also available in Hebrew, in a rather different version).

\* M.D. Goodman, *State and Society in Roman Galilee AD132-212*, New Jersey: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983.

\* L.I. Levine, *The Rabbinic Class of Roman Palestine in Late Antiquity*, Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 1989.

\* C. Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997.

H. Lapin. *Economy, Geography, and Provincial History in Later Roman Palestine*. Tuebingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2001.

### 3. Jews and rabbis of Babylonia.

\* J. Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia*, Leiden: Brill, 1965-70 (5 volumes).

I. Gafni, *The Jews of Babylonia in the Talmudic Era: a Social and Cultural History* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1990.

I. Gafni, *Land, Centre and Diaspora: Jewish Constructs in Antiquity*, JSPS suppl.21, Sheffield Academic Press, 1997.

A. Oppenheimer, *Babylonia Judaica in the Talmudic Period*, Wiesbaden 1983.

### 4. Rabbinic literature.

\* G. Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, trans. M. Bockmuehl, 2nd edn. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996.

\* S. Safrai et al. (eds.), *The Literature of the Sages (Compendium Rerum Judaicarum ad Novum Testamentum II, vol.3)*, parts 1 and 2, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987 – 2006.

### 5. Sourcebooks.

\* L.H. Schiffman, *Texts and Traditions. A Source Reader for the Study of Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism*, Hoboken NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 1998.

L.H.Feldman & M.Reinhold, *Jewish Life and Thought among the Greeks and Romans*, Edinburgh: T.& T.Clark, 1996.

M.H.Williams, *The Jews among the Greeks and Romans: a Diasporan Sourcebook*, London: Duckworth, 1998.

A.Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation*, Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press and Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1987.

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