4AAT1013: Introduction to Jewish Thought and Practice

(Level 4 - 15 credits)

2015–16: Semester 1

Tuesdays, 9-11am, Strand 2.29

Dates: 22 September, 29 September, 6 October, 13 October, 20 October, 3 November, 10 November, 17 November, 1 December, 8 December

(Please note that the 24 November class has been cancelled and rearranged for 8 December.)

Module tutor: Dr Benjamin Williams, benjamin.williams@kcl.ac.uk, Room 3.36 Virginia Woolf Building, Office hours: Tuesdays 2-3pm

Module Syllabus

1. Introduction
This module introduces the history of rabbinic Judaism and key rabbinic texts from antiquity to the middle ages as a springboard for the discussion of topics including exile, tradition and innovation, narrative and law, and Jewish and non-Jewish relations. The first half of the course focuses on the varieties of Judaism that flourished in late antiquity, the destruction of the Temple and the formation of rabbinic Judaism. Following the reading week, classes will turn to the development of diaspora communities in the Muslim world and in the Latin West in the middle ages. Lectures will be interactive throughout, and based on pre-circulated primary and secondary sources that must be studied in advance.

Module Aims
- To introduce key topics in Judaism by studying its history, fundamental texts, concepts and practices
- To develop a deeper understanding of Jewish thought and practice in late antiquity and the middle ages
- To study contemporary scholarly works relevant to the primary texts examined
- To provide a foundation for specialized modules in subsequent years

Learning Outcomes
By the end of the course, students will
- be able to engage critically with the primary sources studied
- be able to present key themes in the development of rabbinic Judaism coherently in written and oral form
- understand the development, content and significance of Judaism’s most important texts
- be able to engage critically with debates about the nature of Jewish thought and practice
Apart from materials that will enable you to take notes, please bring this module syllabus to every lecture. It will also be important to have access to the preparatory readings that you have read and annotated, the notes you have taken, and the questions you have prepared. You will not wish to be the only member of the group who cannot follow a text that is being discussed because you don’t have the text before you with your own annotations.

The essential readings (and many of the recommended readings) can be found on KEATS. But there is no substitute for researching the topics we examine, particularly those you will study for essays and others that are of particular interest to you, in the Maughan Library. Finding the books listed below, and reading beyond the passages suggested, will be a good place to start. Please also consult the library’s excellent “Subject Resources” page for TRS at http://libguides.kcl.ac.uk/trs. Please contact the module tutor or Maughan Library if any relevant sources appear to be missing.

2. Module plan & Readings

**Essential Preparatory Reading**


* It will be essential to read these short books in their entirety (and well worth buying cheap second hand copies from Amazon; note that you will find, upsettingly, copies of the eminent scholar Michael Fishbane’s book by searching for Michael Fishbone; the ISBN is 0060626550).

**Encyclopaediae**


**Atlas**


**Bibliography**

- Rambi. aleph.nli.org.il/F?local_base=rmb01 [a comprehensive database of Jewish Studies articles]

**Week 1 – Tuesday 22 September 2015: Introduction to the module; introduction to the Hebrew Bible**
Essential readings:
- Cohen, Shaye, From the Maccabees to the Mishnah, 3rd edn (Louisville: WJK Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), pp. 1-14

Recommended readings:

Week 2 – 29 September 2015: Varieties of Judaism in the Second Temple Period

Essential readings:
- Primary Sources:

Recommended readings:
- Gafni, Isaiah, ‘The Historical Background’ in The Literature of the Sages, ed. by Shmuel Safrai, i (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1987), pp. 1-34

Week 3 – 6 October 2015: The Destruction of the Temple

Essential readings:
- Primary Sources:

Recommended readings:

**Week 4 – 13 October 2015: Jewish Bible Interpretation in Late Antiquity**

Essential readings:

Recommended readings:

**Week 5 – 20 October 2015: The Mishnah and Talmudim**

Essential reading:
- Primary Sources

Recommended readings:

Even more readings on the Babylonian Talmud:

**Reading Week**

**Week 6 – 3 November 2015: The Rabbinic Academies of Babylonia**

**Essential readings:**
- **Primary Sources:**
  - The Epistle of Sherira Gaon in Rabinowich, Nosson, tr., *The Iggeres of Rav Sherira Gaon* (Jerusalem: Rabbi Jacob Joseph School Press, 1988)
    - pages 70 to 71 (first paragraph only)
    - page 73, last paragraph (“Along came the next generation...”) only
    - page 76, penultimate paragraph (“With these matters...”) only
    - page 84, first paragraph (“As regards your question...”) only

**Recommended readings:**

**Week 7 – 10 November 2015: Jews of the Muslim World**

**Essential readings:**
- **Primary Source**
Recommended readings:

**Week 8 – 17 November 2015: Maimonides and the Maimonidean Controversy**

Essential readings:
- Primary Sources:
- Rudavsky, Tamar, Maimonides (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 1-18

Recommended readings:
- Silver, Daniel, Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy 1180-1240 (Leiden: Brill, 1965), pp. 41-48

Please note that the 24 November class has been cancelled and rearranged for 8 December.

**Week 9 – 1 December 2015: Jewry in the Latin West**

Essential readings:
- Primary Source
  - The Charter of Bishop Rudiger of Speyer in Chazan, Robert, Church, State, and Jew in the Middle Ages (New York: Behrman House, 1980), pp. 57-59
- Marcus, Ivan, ‘History, Story and Collective Memory: Narrativity in Early Ashkenazic Culture’, Prooftexts 10 (1990), 365-88

Recommended readings:

**Week 10 – 8 December 2015: Mysticism and Kabbalah**

**Essential readings:**
- **Primary Source:**

**Recommended readings:**

**3. Assessment**

- Coursework essay (2500 words, contributing 40% to your module mark) on an essay question listed at the end of this syllabus.
  Due: Monday 9 November 2015, **BEFORE 4pm**, on KEATS
  Feedback will be available on KEATS no later than Monday 7 December 2015. Feedback tutorials will offer further guidance on improving your work.

- Final essay (3000 words, contributing 60% to your module mark) on an essay question listed at the end of this syllabus.
  Due: Monday 18 January 2016, **BEFORE 4pm**, on KEATS
  A provisional mark and written feedback will be available on KEATS no later than Monday 15
February 2016.

Scope of assessment

Coursework essay questions generally relate to topics covered in the first half of the module. Final essay questions normally deal with most of the remaining topics, but care is taken to avoid overlap across both sets of questions. Some questions may be formulated so as to encourage analysis, in the same answer, of topics that were investigated in different sessions, including those that fell early in the module.

What is a good essay?

- Good essays will demonstrate a nuanced grasp of any topic, an awareness of its precise historical contexts and a capacity to develop a well-reasoned argument that is convincingly supported by reference to suitable evidence and is presented in a structured manner using clear English.
- One way to approach the introductory paragraph is to state concisely why the issue raised in the title is intriguing, to pinpoint the question(s) or problem(s) it raises, and to say why a better understanding is important and (hopefully!) interesting. A statement of the method by which the essay will resolve the questions(s) can follow, for instance by listing the points that will be made and how they will be demonstrated (perhaps a sentence each?). A final sentence can anticipate the results of the enquiry.
- The points outlined in the introduction are then demonstrated in turn in the body of the essay. It is essential to substantiate each one with reference to primary evidence and secondary sources (always indicating the sources you have used). A well-crafted essay will do so concisely, using words with precision and economy. Each sentence and paragraph will follow on logically, presenting a case to the reader step by step and demonstrating the credibility of the results outlined in the introduction.
- The concluding paragraph can state how the points made in the essay demonstrate the results anticipated. You may also wish to step back and ask yourself (privately!) ‘So what?’; and thereby identify and articulate the implications of the enquiry.
- For more details please see the link to marking criteria below (“Essential Information”).
- Best approaches to essay writing will be discussed as part of the teaching programme in the module. Please seek advice if you are unsure of anything.

Essential information: How do I submit my essay?

- **The Faculty of Arts & Humanities cover-sheet** needs to be the first page of the submitted essays; please follow this link: http://www.kcl.ac.uk/trs/study/handbook/assessment/taught/submission.aspx
- **The candidate number** (e.g. W01234) on the cover-sheet needs to be accurate and of the present academic year. Your work cannot be attributed to you on the College systems, if this information is incomplete or wrong.
- **The word limit** includes all footnotes/endnotes, but excludes the bibliography, which you should provide. There is a 5% tolerance: no penalty will be incurred for essays that are up to 5% over the word limit. Beyond that tolerance band, two marks will be deducted for every 5% of
excess words until 50% is reached. After 50%, three marks will normally be deducted for each further 5% of excess words.

- **The MHRA reference style** has been adopted for this module. Please find the *Quick Guide to Reference Styles in TRS* in the TRS Handbook online. The *presentation of your work*, including the insertion of *page numbers*, quality of *referencing* and bibliographical information and the standard of English, has a strong bearing on the mark given for it.

- **Submission BEFORE 4pm**: Your work must be submitted via the assessment submission section of the KEATS area for the module, by the published deadline, i.e. **before 4pm** on the relevant day. Work with a Turnitin time stamp of 4.00pm counts as a late submission (see next point).

- **Late submissions** will be treated as follows:
  
  Unless an extension has been granted by the Chair of the UG Programme Board of Examiners on the basis of a Mitigating Circumstances Form (MCF), supplied with supporting evidence, or comes to be granted retrospectively:
  
  - Work submitted within 24 hours after the original deadline will be marked, but the mark for this element will be capped at the pass mark of 40%.
  
  - Work submitted more than 24 hours after the original deadline will not be marked, and the submission will receive a mark of zero.

- **Mitigating Circumstances Forms**: MCFs can be downloaded from the Policy Zone of the College website.

  **Extensions retrospectively**: An extension may be granted retrospectively, providing the MCF with supporting documentation is submitted no later than 7 days after the missed assessment and supporting documentation has been received no later than 21 days after the missed assessment. Please note that extensions are granted by the TRS Assessment Board Chair and NOT by individual module tutors.

- **Plagiarism**: Please make sure that you understand the College rules on plagiarism. Information is available at: [http://www.kcl.ac.uk/library/help/plagiarism/index.aspx](http://www.kcl.ac.uk/library/help/plagiarism/index.aspx), and you should also have been enrolled on a KEATS plagiarism module.

- **Oral presentations and plagiarism**: The College’s rules on plagiarism apply to oral presentations, handouts and Powerpoint presentations just as they do to written work submitted for assessment. You must acknowledge any and all sources used in presentations and accompanying material, and must present all material in your own words except for explicitly acknowledged quotations from others.

- **Collusion** also counts as misconduct. Think twice before circulating your work to other students.

- **Marking**: Your essays for this module will be assessed according to Model 3: [https://www.kcl.ac.uk/trs/study/handbook/assessment/taught/markmodels.aspx](https://www.kcl.ac.uk/trs/study/handbook/assessment/taught/markmodels.aspx)

  **Essays**: First and second markers will apply the Faculty’s Undergraduate Marking Criteria: [http://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/study/handbook/sguides/assessment/ugmarkcrit.pdf](http://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/study/handbook/sguides/assessment/ugmarkcrit.pdf)

  **Classroom presentation and participation** are assessed in line with these Marking Criteria: [https://www.kcl.ac.uk/trs/modules/level6/files/TRS-Marking-Criteria-for-presentations.pdf](https://www.kcl.ac.uk/trs/modules/level6/files/TRS-Marking-Criteria-for-presentations.pdf)

4. **Coursework Essay**

Please choose **ONE** question:
1. What beliefs and practices did all varieties of Judaism in the first century CE have in common? Please discuss three or more examples.

Readings: See particularly the suggested readings for week 2. Additional sources include
- Stern, Sacha, Sects and Sectarianism in Jewish History (Leiden: Brill, 2011)
- Stern, Sacha, Jewish Identity in Early Rabbinic Writings (Leiden: Brill, 1994)

2. ‘The Council of Yavneh is a scholarly myth without documentary foundation.’ If so, what is the significance of Yavneh in the formation of Rabbinic Judaism?

Readings: See particularly the suggested readings for week 3. Additional sources include

3. ‘There are seventy faces to the Torah.’ How does this saying illustrate the midrashic approach to scriptural exegesis?

Readings: See particularly the suggested readings for week 4. Additional sources include

4. For what purpose was the Mishnah produced?

Readings: See particularly the suggested readings for week 5. Additional sources include

5. Final Essay

Please choose ONE question:

1. “The Talmud really is the heart of Judaism. After the Bible, it is the book most studied by Jews.” (Norman Solomon) When and how did the Babylonian Talmud attain such importance?

Readings: See particularly the suggested readings for weeks 5 and 6.

2. Is Ibn Daud’s account of the four captives a reliable historical source? Explain your answer.

Readings: See particularly the suggested readings for week 7. Additional sources include
- Marcus, Ivan, ‘History, Story and Collective Memory: Narrativity in Early Ashkenazic Culture’, Prooftexts 10 (1990), 365-88

3. Why were Maimonides’ works so controversial? Explain your answer with reference to the Mishneh Torah and/or the Guide of the Perplexed.

Readings: See particularly the suggested readings for week 8. Additional sources include
4. ‘The Zohar is a pseudepigraph attributed to Simeon b. Yohai’ (G. Scholem). If this is correct, who really wrote the Zohar? Justify your answer.

Readings: See particularly the suggested readings for week 10.