COURSE SYLLABUS

Asceticism, Mysticism, and Gender in Jewish Tradition

Instructor:
Name, title  Prof. Ada Rapoport Albert
Department  Jewish Studies
Central European University
Semester  Winter 2016
Course level MA, PhD
4 Credits (8 ECTS Credits)
Pre-requisites (if applicable) None
Course e-learning site:
Office hours: days

Course Description
The absence of women from the extant record of the Jewish mystical tradition has been contrasted with the robust and well-attested presence of numerous women in the mystical traditions of both Christianity and Islam. The course endeavors to explain this peculiarity while at the same time re-examining the current definitions of Jewish mystical spirituality, considering the possibility of extending their scope so as to integrate in the tradition a variety of female visionary and spiritual experiences which may well belong in it. Special attention will be paid to the exceptional prominence of women in the 17th century mystical-messianic heresy of Sabbateanism and its offshoots, as well as to the position of women in the revivalist movement of Hasidism, from its inception in 18th century Poland to the present.

Learning Outcomes
{Specific statements of what students will know and be able to do as they leave the course, achievable and measurable through course assignments. Courses would normally have 4-6 learning outcomes. Those should in turn relate to learning outcomes of the program (as stated in program specifications). Some examples from different courses/subjects are given below}

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

✔ Undertake gender-sensitive analysis of historical documents
✔ Critically discuss competing conceptualizations and reconstructions of tradition
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✓ Gain critical insight into the function of religion in pre-modern and modern societies
✓ Consider religious norms from a comparative perspective

Course Requirements
(In deciding on the number and kinds of assessment for the course the instructor should take care to make sure all the learning outcomes stated above can be adequately assessed through those methods. Additionally, the instructor should take care that formative assessment is in place – i.e. there is a mid-course assessment to make sure that the learning outcomes are being achieved by the students and to allow for mid-course corrections if necessary. There should thus be a minimum of two assessment methods in the course). Do I specify deadline dates for the submission of each of the assignments below?

(1) Assessment type 1 (50% of the final grade). A 3000-word mid-term review of the prescribed scholarly literature on any of the topics covered up to that point in the course. The grade will be determined on the basis of scope of coverage, critical analysis, coherent structure and presentation.

(2) Assessment type 2 (50% of the final grade). A 6000-word essay, on a topic to be selected in consultation with the course instructor, focusing on a particular aspect of any topic covered in the course, demonstrating the ability to synthesize diverse sources, to raise critical questions and deal with them analytically and to present a coherent argument. The grade will be determined on the basis of scope of coverage, critical analysis, originality of thought and coherent presentation.

Course Schedule

Classes will be held twice a week, on Mondays, 15.30-17.10 and Thursdays, 17.20-19.00

Week 1: The Jewish mystical tradition: magic, spirituality, piety and Kabbalah
Reading:
(Mandatory readings are bookmarked)
- Gershom Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, pp. 1-39
- —, Kabbalah, pp. 8-86
- Moshe Idel, Kabbalah – New Perspectives (esp. pp. 1-34)
- Joseph Dan, Kaabbalah: A Very Short Introduction

Week 2: Women in Jewish law and society
Readings:
- Rachel Biale, Women and Jewish Law, pp. 10-43, 147-174
- Moshe Meiselman, Jewish Woman in Jewish Law
- Avraham Grossman, Pious and Rebellious, pp. 8-32
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• Judith R. Baskin (ed.), *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, pp. 73-168

**Week 3: Jewish mysticism as a “masculine doctrine”?**
Readings:
• Sharon Faye Koren, *Forsaken: The Menstruant in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*, ‘Introduction, pp. 1-12, and any or all of the subsequent chapters
• Elliot Wolfson, *Circle in the Square*, pp. 79-121
• —, *Language, Eros, Being*, pp. 46-110

**Week 4: The construction of sexuality and gender in Rabbinic tradition**
Readings:
• Michael L. Satlow, *Tasting the Dish: Rabbinic Rhetorics of Sexuality*, pp. 146-183, 243-244, 315-333
• Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*
• David Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, pp. 33-100

**Week 5: The construction of sexuality and gender in Kabbalah**
Readings:
• Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, pp. 140-96
• —, *Circle in the Square: Studies in the Use of Gender in Kabbalistic Symbolis*, pp. 1-78
• David Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, pp. 101-120
• —, *Kabbalah and Eros*, any or all of the five chapters, but see pp. 247-250
• —, ‘Sexual Metaphors and Praxis in the Kabbalah’, in David Kraemer (ed.), *The Jewish Family: Metaphors and Memory*, pp. 197-224
• *The Holy Letter: A Study in Medieval Jewish Morality*, edited and translated by Seymour J. Cohen
• Charles Mopsik, *Sex and the Soul*, pp. 5-52
Week 6: Ascetic piety and its implications for women
Readings:
- Eliezer Diamond, *Holy Men and Hunger Artists: Fasting and Asceticism in Rabbinic Culture*
- Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, 134-66
- David Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, pp. 33-100
- ----, “Peering through the Lattices”: Mystical, Magical, and Pietistic Dimensions in the Tosafist Period, pp 19-130

Week 7: Female piety in medieval and early modern Ashkenaz
Readings:
- Avraham Grossman, *Pious and Rebellious*, pp. 198-211
- Monford Harris, ‘The Concept of Love in *Sefer Hassidim*’, *Jewish Quarterly Review* 50 (1959-60), pp. 13-44
- —, ‘Dolce of Worms: The Lives and Deaths of an Exemplary Medieval Jewish Woman and Her Daughters’, ibid., pp. 429-37
  *The Life of Glückel of Hameln 1646-1724 Written by Herself*, translated from the original Yiddish and edited by Beth-Zion Abrahams
- Chava Weissler, *Voices of the Matriarchs*, pp. 76-146
Week 8: Visionary women in early modern Jewish culture
Readings:

- Renée Levine Melammed, ‘Visionary Experiences among Spanish Crypto-Jewish Women’, *Judaism in Practice*, pp. 348-52
- —, *Heredics or Daughters of Israel*, pp. 45-72

Week 9: Virgins, wives, and the divine female in heretical messianism: the Sabbatean movement and its offshoots
Readings:

- —, *Sabbatai Șevi The Mystical Messiah*, 1626-1676, s.v. Șevi, Sarah; Women: status of, in SS’s messianism
- —, *Kabbalah*, pp. 287-309
- Matt Goldish, *The Sabbatean Prophets*, s.v. women
- Harris Lenowitz, *The Jewish Messiahs*, pp. 167-98
- Arthur Mandel, *The Militant Messiah*, pp. 75-8, 155-70
- Pawel Maciejko, ‘Coitus interruptus in *And I Came This Day unto the Fountain*, in *R. Jonathan Eibeschütz: And I Came This Day unto the Fountain*, Critically edited and Introduced by Pawel Maciejko, pp. i-lili

Week 10: Women in Hasidism
Readings:

- S. A. Horodezky, *Leaders of Hasidism*, pp. 111-17
- Ada Rapoport-Albert, ‘On Women in Hasidism, S.A. Horodecky and

- —, *Women and the Messianic heresy of Sabbatai Zevi 1666-1816*, pp. 258-296
- Tamar El-Or, *Educated and Ignorant. Ultra-orthodox Women and Their World*

**Week 11: Women and gender in HaBaD-Lubavitch**

Readings:

- Naftali Loewenthal, ‘Women and the Dialectic of Spirituality in Hasidism’, in Immanuel Etkes et al. (eds.), *Within Hasidic Circles: Studies in Hasidism in Memory of Mordecai Wilensky* (Hebrew), English section, pp. 7-65
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- Bonnie Morris, *Lubavitcher Women in America*
- Uri Kaploun (ed.), *A Partner in the Dynamic of Creation: Womanhood in the Teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson*
- Jerome R. Nintz, *Hasidic People: A Place in the New World*, s.v. Chabad (=Habad; Lubavitcher movement); Lubavitcher Hasidim; Schneerson, Menachem Mendel

**Week 12: Concluding Discussion**

{Other divisions within readings are possible depending on the subject, e.g. primary and secondary sources, theoretical and applied sources, remedial (e.g. read this if you have difficulties reading the mandatory sources), enrichment/option (e.g. read this if you have an in-depth interest in this specific area, etc.)}