Course Syllabus

Jews of Islam (in Building of Two Close People) 7th-14th Centuries

Course Code: HUMA40000
Course Title: Jews of Islam (in Building of Two Close People) 7th-14th Centuries
Course Offered in: Spring 2020
Course Instructor: Menahem Ben-Sasson

Course Description: The Islamic conquests brought under the Muslim rulers almost all the Jewish diaspora. It created a kind of a “melting pot” that shaped the Jewish people anew. The Jews of Islam enjoyed special legal conditions and developed unique life during the high middle ages. Series of major changes in their lives shaped a new Jewish world that touched upon any department of their lives: legal status, economy, demography, language, intellectual creativity as well as social structure. The course is aimed at understanding this important and unique period of the history of the Jewish people. The history of the Jews under Islam: The central leadership, the local community and their institutions. The new centers and their peculiarities. Jewish sects and special groups, Karaits and Sufism. The new Jewish Bookshelf. Judaism and Islam – Law, Theology and Daily life. Milestones in the history of the Oriental Jewry: the Muslim conquest, the fall of the caliphate and the rise of the local powers, the Shi’ite Fatimids (969-1171) the crisis of the 12th Century, the Ayyubids and the Mameluks. The courses will combine some texts (translated to English) with thorough analysis in their context.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

1. The student will acquire methods and research tools of history discipline.
2. The student will acquire basic knowledge of the historical time-line of the Middle-East.
3. The student will follow the development of the medieval Islamic scenery and its Jewish centers and major communities.
4. The student will learn the economy and ways of leaving of the Islamic world and the role of the Jews in it.
5. The student will be equitant with the variety of the literary works that changed the Jewish life.
6. The student will be exposed to research methods, analytic models and various hypotheses that had modified stereotypes and traditional images of minorities.
7. The student will create and write a presentation (or academic paper) based on historical sources.

Course Outline: Class Meeting and Topic

1. Boundaries – People, Time and Space
The geographical set-up; Main Muslim dynasties and rulers; Population (methods for estimation) and demographical changes; “Special” communities (Khazars, Himyar, Ethiopia); Sources and major trends in research.

2. Legal Status and Security Conditions
Qura’an verses re. Christians, Jews and other minorities; ‘Umar Covenant; The changes in the conquered area; Minorities in Muslims administration; The attitude of Muslim law masters and
lawmakers towards the Jews; The masses and the minorities (economic pressures, stereotypes, religious attitude); Events of violence and persecution against minorities; A comparative look to the Medieval scenery

3. Jewish Economy - Image and Reality
The main commercial routes and the Rahdhanites. The relative advantage of the Jews in new international economy. Methods and special arrangements for the changes. Three trends in Jewish economic activities. The Jewish Bankers – Image and Reality. Economic activities and their social ramifications. Some important Jews in the economic life of Muslim lands; The decline of the intensive Jewish involvement in the Muslim countries economic activity.

4. Central Leadership
The holy centers in Palestine and in Babylonia; The “authority” its meaning and functioning; Expressions of centrality; The tension between the centers; Four forms of dependent of the Jewish Diaspora on the central institutions; The literary results of the Diaspora-center dialog; Leaders of the Jewish centers 7th to 12th centuries; The decline of the centers and the replacements.

5. The Beginnings of the Local Community
The three types of the Jewish community in Muslim lands; Principals of self-organization; The local community and the Jewish centers; The local community and the local Muslim authorities; Sources of authority in the local community; The inter-communal organization of Spain and North Africa; The Nagidate.

6. The Community - The Basic Cell for the Nation's Life
The self-identity of the Jew; The goals and the values of the local community; Tensions among members of the community (rich-poor; knowledge-ignorant; immigrants and locals); The common and the unique of certain communities; Rise and decline of Jewish communities.

7. Local Institutions - Principals and Functions
Each of the mentioned below will be dealt according to a different community: Representatives of the community; The Jewish court; The synagogue; The local academy; The sages; Educational network; Social and welfare; The budget.

8. Law and Codification
The study of the Talmud; Geonic monographies; Leading writers who made the change (Yehudai,Saadya, Sherira, Samuel b. Hofni and Hai); Later commentaries on Talmud; Moses Maimonides projects; Codifiers as international Jewish authority. Major disputes and polemics.

9. Karaism and Sufism
The beginning of the movements – revolution and continuity; Reflections to Muslim phenomena; Messianism and its context; Militant reflections to traditional Judaism

10. Bible, Language and Poetry
The revival of the Hebrew language (Iraq-North Africa-Spain). The Court Jew, the new cultural values and the social circles; The dictionaries; Debate on legitimacy of new poetry (Dunas, Menahem); Back to
the Biblical language; Holy and Secular poetry in daily usage; National poetry (Jewish and general); Secondary usage of poetry (letters, politics, propaganda, fund-raising); The levels of the Hebrew knowledge.

11. Philosophy and Mysticism
The inheritance of the classical world among the Arabs; Representatives of various philosophical schools among Jews; Rationalism a secular ideology; The Karaites and their writings; Critique of the elite circles and the secular movements via the philosophy; The rise of Sufism among Eastern Jews.

12. Sciences and Medicine
The medical profession among Jews and its contact to the economical and a political life; The scientific world of the period; Alchemist and Astrology; Mathematics and Astronomy; Jewish scientists as an authority in their field and the question of conversion; The school of Provencal translators - a Western or Eastern Jewish phenomenon

13. The Period's Visage
Unity and Separation among the Muslim Jewish communities; Were the Jews isolated from the Muslim world; The place of belief and commitment on the Eastern Jewish scale of values; The representation of the cultural and the historical data.

Planned Assessment Tasks

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<tr>
<th>Course participation:</th>
<th>10%</th>
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<tr>
<td>Two in-class tests:</td>
<td>40% (20%+20%(</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final term paper:</td>
<td>50%</td>
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Background Readings

R. Drory, Models and Contacts – Arabic Literature and its Impact on Medieval Jewish Culture, Leiden 2000,
M. Gil, Jews in Islamic countries in the Middle Ages, Leiden and Boston 2004
N. A. Stillman, The Jews of Arab Lands, I, Philadelphia 1979