

JEWISH MARTYRDOM
FALL 2009
HIS 350L, JS 364, RS 357
Garrison 0.132
Tuesday, 3:30-6:30
Professor Miriam Bodian

This course will deal with Jewish martyrdom – both as a real phenomenon and as an imaginative element of collective tradition and identity. The course attempts to follow a chronological format, but seeks to focus on major problems rather than to present a comprehensive survey. We will address the following questions, among others: How did an ideal of martyrdom arise in late antiquity, in general, and in Second Temple Judaism, in particular? What can we learn about Jewish societies and cultures from the martyrological narratives and poetry they have produced? Can those works throw light on scantily chronicled events? What particular web of meaning have they woven around death “for the sanctification of the Name”? How, over the centuries, have Jews drawn from pagan, Catholic, and Protestant expressions of martyrdom? How have conceptions of Jewish martyrdom changed in response to new historical and cultural realities, and how have older traditions been appropriated for new aims? And, finally, under what circumstances have Jews been prompted to question the value of a tradition of martyrdom?

Course requirements: Students must come to class having done the reading and prepared for discussion. The final grade will reflect class participation (10%) and grades received on two short papers (20% each) and a final paper (50%).

Required to purchase:

Robert Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusade* (paper).

1) Sept. 1 – Introduction: The Debate over the Origins of Martyrdom

To be distributed in class: W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (1967), 34-37; G.W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (1995), 6-14; J. W. van Henten, *Martyrdom and Noble Death* (2002), 2-6; Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God* (1999), 91-97.

2) Sept. 8 – Jewish Martyrdom in the Hellenistic World

Sources: 2 Maccabees Chs. 6-7 and 4 Maccabees Chs. 5-18

Gerson Cohen, “Hannah and Her Seven Sons in Hebrew Literature,” in idem, *Studies in the Variety of Rabbinic Cultures*, 39-60.

Tessa Rajak, "Dying for the Law: The Martyr's Portrait in Jewish-Greek Literature," in M.J. Edwards and Simon Swain, eds., *Portraits: Biographical Representation in the Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire*, 39-67.

3) Sept. 15 – Jewish Martyrdom in Late Antiquity and Beyond (I)

Sources: Talmud Bavli Berakhot, 61b; Talmud Bavli Abodah Zara, 17b-18a.

"Midrash eleh ezkerah, or 'The Legend of the Ten Martyrs,'" in David Stern and Mark Mirsky, eds., *Rabbinic Fantasies: Imaginative Narratives from Classical Hebrew Literature*, 143-165.

Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 3-59.

4) Sept. 22 – Jewish Martyrdom in Late Antquity and Beyond (II)

Sources: Talmud Bavli Avodah Zarah 27b; Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 74a-b; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Yesodei ha-Torah*, 5: 1-3.

5) Sept. 29 – Medieval Ashkenaz (I)

Robert Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusade*, 50-136. (not on Blackboard)

Haym Soloveitchik, "Religious Law and Change: The Medieval Ashkenazic Example," *AJS Review* 12 (1987), 205-221.

Source: Chronicle attributed to Solomon bar Samson, in Robert Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusade*, 243-297. (not on Blackboard)

6) Oct. 6 – Medieval Ashkenaz (II)

Jeremy Cohen, *Sanctifying the Name of God: Jewish Martyrs and Jewish Memories of the First Crusade*, 1-9, 55-69, 106-129.

Susan Einbinder, *A Beautiful Death*, 17-69.

7) Oct. 13 – Medieval Sepharad

Elisheva Carlebach, *Between History and Hope*, 1-4.

Cecil Roth, "A Hebrew Elegy on the Martyrs of Toledo, 1391," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 39 (1948-49), 135-150.

Miriam Bodian, *Dying in the Law of Moses: Crypto-Jewish Martyrdom in the Iberian World*, Chapter 1. (online, UT libraries)

8) Oct. 20 – Crypto-Jewish Martyrdom: Reformation Echoes

Miriam Bodian, *Dying in the Law of Moses*, Chapters 3, 7. (online, UT libraries)

James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 1-16, 203-227.

9) Oct. 27 – The Chmielnitski Massacres

Gershon Bacon, "'The House of Hannover': *Gezeirot Tah* in Modern Jewish Historical Writing," *Jewish History* 17 (2003), 179-206.

Source: Nathan Nata Hannover, *Yeven Metzulah (Abyss of Despair)*, 50-69.

10) Nov. 3 – The "New Jew" and Ambivalence about the Tradition of Martyrdom

Source: H.N. Bialik, "The City of Slaughter" (Hebrew original and English translation in *Prooftexts* 25 (2005), 8-29.

Anita Shapira, "'In the City of Slaughter' versus 'He Told Her,'" *Prooftexts* 25 (2005), 86-102.

11) Nov. 10 – The Holocaust (I): Drawing from Traditional Paradigms

Pesach Schindler, "The Holocaust and Kiddush Hashem in Hassidic Thought," *Tradition* 13 (1973), 88-104.

Shimon Huberband, *Kiddush Hashem: Jewish Religious and Cultural Life in Poland During the Holocaust*, 247-259.

Stanley Brodwin, "History and Martyrological Tragedy: The Jewish Experience in Sholem Asch and Andre Schwartz-Bart," *Twentieth Century Literature* 40 (1994), 72-91.

12) Nov. 17 – The Holocaust (II): New Definitions

Shaul Esh, "The Dignity of the Destroyed: Towards a Definition of the Period of the Holocaust," *Judaism* 11 (Spring 1962), 99-111.

Emil Fackenheim, "On the Life, Death, and Transfiguration of Martyrdom: The Jewish Testimony to the Divine Image in Our Time," *The Jewish Return into History*, 234-51.

13) Nov. 24 – Israeli Public Life and the Issue of "Heroic" and "Unheroic" Death

Robert Alter, "The Masada Complex," *Commentary* 56:1 (1973), 19-24. (fulltext online)

Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*, 13-76, 192-213.

14) Dec. 1 – Discussion of papers