

WORLD CULTURES: ANCIENT ISRAEL

Autumn 2009, New York University
Prof. Daniel Fleming

SYLLABUS

Teaching staff:

Daniel Fleming, Professor of Hebrew Bible and Assyriology, df2@nyu.edu

Clémence Boulouque, doctoral student preceptor, c.boulouk@gmail.com

Lynn Kaye, doctoral student preceptor, lrkaye@gmail.com

Mahri Leonard-Fleckman, doctoral student preceptor, mahrilf@gmail.com

Office hours for the professor: Monday and Wednesday (set time before or after class)

Office hours for preceptors as set individually.

Prof. Fleming's telephone is 212-998-8985, but the most reliable way to make rapid contact is by email.

The Skirball Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies

Shayne Figueroa, secretary, 212-998-8980

53 Washington Square South, first floor (enter at right of elevators, to right from atrium)

Prof. Fleming's office, room 211, second floor from inside department, to back on left

Prof. Fleming's mailbox, at foot of staircase, middle of top row (for turning in late papers)

The course

“Ancient Israel” refers to the ancestors of the Jewish people from the time of the Hebrew Bible (Jewish Tanakh, Christian Old Testament), as this Bible defines them. By this name, its story is known mainly from the Bible, although archaeology offers a trove of independent evidence, and there are all sorts of other writings from the region to cast light on this faraway world. A class on ancient Israel can be taught from any number of perspectives, but at NYU, our goal is to get you thinking about these people as themselves, before time made them the spokesmen and women for Judaism and Christianity.

Beyond the content, my goal is to help you learn to think for yourselves – to evaluate evidence independently, to reason critically, and to argue your conclusions persuasively. Analytical papers therefore form a major part of the work for the course, and we will train you for what we want you to do. At the same time, content for the course will be tied closely to two texts, both of which must be consumed with the same critical eye that we encourage for your research. In order to provide a coherent focus of primary material, and because I love working with the book, this version of Ancient Israel is going to use the Bible as the essential point of reference. This may sound obvious, but for me as teacher, it is a dangerous choice, and I look forward to provoking you to read it afresh. Don't worry, though. All points of view are legit.

You need to keep an open mind, however, and to approach this with the attitude of an explorer, excited to face the unknown.

Materials

All three books should be available at the NYU Bookstore.

1. *The Jewish Study Bible* (JPS Tanakh translation). This is an up-to-date Jewish translation of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament. I would like everyone to use the same text, for coherence of evidence in both classwork and writing assignments.
2. *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*, Michael D. Coogan editor. For historical background and context, we will work through much of this volume, which consists of separate chapters by separate authors, each with a different point of view.
3. *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*, by Karel van der Toorn. A wonderful Dutch scholar wrote this volume as an alternative to standard introductions to the Bible, but intending to reach university students like you. You will get a feel for the Bible as the product of an ancient profession that you probably knew little about.

Requirements

NOTE: It is always a challenge to choose due dates that properly spread out the work load and leave adequate time to prepare. This year, the Jewish holidays fall on the early side, in late September and early October, and I have squeezed together the first paper and the mid-term exam, only one week apart. My goal is to have both of these take place after the holidays. If you have any concern about rushing to be ready for them, make sure to begin the paper early.

1. Two in-class exams (15% each): Wednesday, October 21st; Monday, December 14th.

The course is divided into three parts, with the longest one first. This first section on “Israel through time” will provide a background to the biblical storyline for Israel’s history, with reference to issues that each period involves. The mid-term exam will follow that first section of the course, and the final will take place on the last day of regular class. Exams will be based on a combination of basic factual information, for which you will be provided a study sheet, and comprehension of lecture content.

2. Three papers (20%, 20%, and 30%):

- a. Reading for yourself: David and Jonathan, Gilgamesh and Enkidu – due Wednesday, October 14th.

More than anything, I want you to become better readers of evidence, better analytical thinkers, and better writers of well-reasoned, persuasive essays. The three papers are intended to provide a sequence that will help you strengthen your skills with projects that relate to ancient Israel and the Bible in particular. As a specialist in writing, I will have you

work mainly with written evidence, which also tends to create a level field, so all can build an argument from the same material.

The goal of the first paper is to get you thinking for yourselves about primary evidence, the actual material from the ancient world, without resorting to the opinions of any outside scholar. I do not want you to look for or cite ANY sources. **DO NOT LOOK FOR HELP ON THE INTERNET.** The first paper is based on two stories that portray intense bonds between two heroic men: David and Jonathan in the Bible's book of 1 Samuel, and Gilgamesh and Enkidu in the Gilgamesh Epic from Mesopotamia. You must evaluate the portrayals in each case and compare them, from the evidence alone. Detailed instructions will be provided separately.

b. Reading in conversation, dry run for the research paper: Asherah, God's wife? – due Wednesday, November 11th.

The goal of the writing work for this course is a final research paper that includes both your own analysis of primary evidence and ideas from specialists who have worked carefully with that evidence. Before you take that on, this project gives you a chance to practice with the training wheels on. In instructions to be provided later, we will give you detailed guidance related to investigating the role of the goddess Asherah in the religion of Israel. The Bible has something to say, and there is fascinating – even shocking? – evidence from contemporary writing. For this project, we will supply a set of readings that you will find on our Blackboard site, and you must weigh their interpretations in light of your own sense of the evidence. You must get used to entering the fray with scholars who know more than you do but who nevertheless can't agree on a conclusion. As always, your own reasoning from the raw facts matters more than anything else.

c. Final research paper – due Monday, December 21st.

This research paper is the culmination of your work on the two shorter papers. Suggested topics will be provided on the Blackboard site, but you may choose your own, **WITH THE PROFESSOR'S APPROVAL.** For the research papers, you will have to find and evaluate your own secondary sources, which will not be on reserve. We are hoping that Evelyn Ehrlich, Head of the Humanities and Social Sciences Center at the Bobst Library, will once again help students learn how to take full advantage of the library for developing their own bibliographies.

Administration

Grading for this course will be shared by the professor and the assistants. Students will be graded on a regular basis by their preceptors, but I will take at least an equal share of each assignment and try to grade each student's work at least once during the semester. The four teaching staff will meet to compare grades in each case, so that we come as close as possible to matching evaluations. Professor Fleming takes final responsibility for every grade, within the following structure. If you believe that your grade is in error or not fair, please approach first the

person who graded the work, for review. If you are still not satisfied after your preceptor reconsiders a grade, you may submit it to the professor, whose judgment is final. I have a bias toward supporting the careful decisions of my assistants.

Late papers will be graded down as follows. Up to and including one week, one grade fraction (e.g. B to B-); more than one week, through the end of the term, one full grade (e.g. B to C). **IF YOU HAVE ANY PROBLEM MEETING DEADLINES, INFORM YOUR PRECEPTOR OR THE PROFESSOR AS SOON AS YOU ARE AWARE OF IT.** It is always possible to consider special circumstances, to be judged on an individual basis. Again, the professor takes final responsibility for deciding how to handle individual requests about problems.

Class sessions and reading

PART I: ISRAEL THROUGH TIME, BIBLE IN HAND

September 9, Ancient Israel: defining some limits

- no reading for the first class
- (or, try something from Davies book on Israel?)

September 14, The Bible's story of Israel

- (choose material to read for feel of Genesis to Kings)
- (anything interesting on how the Bible story relates to history, to put on Blackboard? Kitchen and Van Seters? Brettler?)

September 16, The beginnings of Israel in the Bible

- (choose Jacob stories from Genesis, with wives and children; Judges 5; Exodus 14; Joshua 6; expand each of these for more context?)
- (any sort of article on this, focused on how the Bible presents this? Where to go for something actually interesting?)

September 21, Earliest Israel, without the Bible

- (whole Merneptah Stela from something?)
- (something on the Merneptah Stela; check my bibliography)

September 23, Historians at work on earliest Israel

- *Oxford History*, Chapter 3: "Forging an Identity: The Emergence of Ancient Israel" (Lawrence Stager)

September 28 (Yom Kippur) – consider having no class (ask TAs; it's the only holiday, I think)

September 30, An "era of the Judges"?

- Read all of Judges 2-16.
- *Oxford History*, Chapter 4: "'There Was No King in Israel': The Era of the Judges" (Jo Ann Hackett)

- (Consider something from Killebrew or Faust on ethnicity.)

October 5, How Israel came to have kings

- Read 1 Samuel 8-26; 2 Samuel 2-5; 1 Chronicles 10-11.
- *Oxford History*, Chapter 5: “Kinship and Kingship: The Early Monarchy” (Carol Meyers)

October 7, Competing kingdoms: Israel as a twosome

- Read 1 Kings 12-16; 2 Kings 9-10, 17; 2 Chronicles 10-11.
- *Oxford History*, Chapter 6: “A Land Divided: Judah and Israel from the Death of Solomon to the Fall of Samaria” (Edward Campbell)
- (Get part of Davies on Israel in the Bible)

October 12, Israel and Judah in writing outside the Bible

- (Get readings from COS or the like: Mesha, Tel Dan, Shalmaneser, Kuntillet Ajrud, at least.)
- *Oxford History*, Chapter 6 (continued)

October 14, Judah’s world – FIRST PAPER DUE

- Read 2 Kings 18-25; 2 Chronicles 29-36; Jeremiah 1-5.
- *Oxford History*, Chapter 7: “Into Exile: From the Assyrian Conquest of Israel to the Fall of Babylon” (Mordechai Cogan)

October 19, The end and the beginning

- Read Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai (the whole books).
- *Oxford History*, Chapter 8: “Israel among the Nations: The Persian Period” (Mary Joan Winn Leith)
- (Something from Liz Fried’s book.)

October 21, In-class mid-term exam

PART II: THE BIBLE AS A SOURCE

October 26, The Bible as a source

- Genesis 1; Exodus 1; Leviticus 1; Numbers 1; Deuteronomy 1; Joshua 1; Judges 1; 1 Samuel 1; 1 Chronicles 1; Isaiah 1; Jeremiah 1; Ezekiel 1; Psalm 1; Proverbs 1; Ruth 1; Esther 1.
- van der Toorn, Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2

October 28, The first cut: Israel and Judah

- (What to read from the Bible? Some Hosea and Isaiah? Judges 3-9 again.)
- (The introduction to my new book, *The Legacy of Israel in Judah’s Bible*.)
- (Something from a Bible introduction on the dates of Bible writing; or Mark in Memoirs? Blenkinsopp from Pentateuch?)

November 2, About scribes

- (Samples of Mesopotamian texts from what van der Toorn cites.)
- van der Toorn, Chapters 3 and 4

November 4, On making books

- van der Toorn, Chapter 5 (in detail)

November 9, Bible revision: a case study (Sara Milstein guest lecturer)

- Judges 19-21; 1 Samuel 1-11
- (Reading from Sara, if she wants.)

PART III: THE BIBLE AND LIFE IN ISRAEL

November 11, God – SECOND PAPER DUE

- (Something on monotheism from the Bible.)
- (Selections from the Baal Myth of Ugarit.)
- (Something from Mark Smith's religion writings.)

November 16, Being human

- Read Genesis 1-3.
- (Something on myth; say, from that classic myth book, I'm forgetting the author!)
- (Something from creation in Mesopotamia; part of Atrahasis?)
- (Something on Genesis and fall; say James Barr.)

November 18, Being female

- (So much to choose from: Sarah and Hagar, Leah and Rachel, Ruth, Esther, Jezebel, Delilah, Tamar...)
- (Mari letters by women.)
- (Pillar figurines, something on them.)

November 23 – Need you guys to cover for me! Talk about topics.

November 25, Thanksgiving

- (Psalms of thanks, Psalms of complaint, from the Bible.)
- (Examples of such from Mesopotamia; Ugarit's incantation literature.)

November 30, Being gay?

- Read Leviticus 18; 1 Samuel 18-20, 31; 2 Samuel 1.
- (Selections from the Gilgamesh Epic, especially the Penn tablet.)
- (Article by Boyarin on Leviticus law.)
- (Something on Gilgamesh, etc.; especially the warrior culture.)

December 2, Sex and violence

- (Genesis 19; Judges 19; Ruth 3; Ezekiel 16; other?)
- (Think about readings.)

December 7, Madness

- Read 1 Samuel 16:14-23; 18:1-16; 19:18-24; 20:24-34.
- (Think about what to read with this.)

December 9, What can God say to a suffering man? The book of Job
- Read Job 1-10, 31-32, 38-42.

December 14, In-class final exam

December 21, FINAL PAPER DUE