

WHAT IS CANON?

Fall 2019

M/W 11:40 a.m.-12:55 p.m., U504

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Office hours Wednesdays 9-11, K502

What do we mean when we refer to “the canon,” whether that is “the Jewish canon” or “the classics” in the Humanities? Who decides what texts are included in those lists and what texts aren't? Can new texts be added, and if so, by whom? Can canonical texts disagree with each other? While this class will primarily focus on the formation of what is now considered the Jewish textual canon, we will consider questions of authority, tradition, and innovation that will help us better understand both Jewish and non-Jewish approaches to text and culture.

Expectations, Assignments, and Grades

First and foremost, please make sure you familiarize yourself with Canvas and check it regularly. If you want Canvas notifications to go to your email, be sure you have that set up. All communications about the class will happen through our course site, and if I need to communicate with any of you individually I will do so over the course site as well (unless you've emailed me first, which of course you are welcome to do).

You are expected to come to class having read the texts listed for that date on the syllabus (so, for example, please come to class on Sept. 9 having prepared the Halbertal and J. Z. Smith readings). You must *bring a copy of the week's text(s) to class*—this is crucial so that we can all refer to back to the texts during class discussions. You will also be asked to sign up to “jump-start” one class during the semester, which means you will start us off with some thoughts and questions for the day.

Your participation is what will make this seminar rewarding. If you must be absent because of an illness, a family obligation, a professional commitment, or an emergency, email me before class. Repeated absences will count against your grade.

Each week, I will provide you with guiding questions on Canvas to help you with the reading, which will sometimes be pretty technical. If you have any questions as you prepare the readings, please don't hesitate to email me, come to my office hours, or schedule another time to meet with me. You should come prepared to discuss the guiding questions in class—jotting down a few sentences in response to each question is not required but is definitely recommended.

In addition to this informal preparation, you will also be asked to submit ten reading responses for any ten weeks of your choice starting Sept. 9. This should be a typed, approximately two-

page response to one or two of the guiding questions, to be submitted on Canvas anytime *before* the designated class.

Finally, you'll be asked to write two papers over the course of the semester:

1. Your own midrash/rewritten Bible/Biblical fanfiction, plus a reflection. This should be approximately 5 pages and is due Nov. 25.
2. A research paper comparing the formation and any controversies over a contemporary/secular canon—e.g., the Marvel Cinematic Universe, Star Wars, Harry Potter, Game of Thrones, or run another idea by me—and the formation/controversies over a subset of Jewish canon—e.g., the Pentateuch/Torah, the Tanakh, the genre of halakha, or liturgy. I will provide you with a list of suggested resources for researching contemporary canons. This paper should be about 10 pages. Your topic is due on Dec. 4, and the final paper is due Dec. 19.

Your grade for the class will be calculated as follows:

Class Participation: 15%

Attendance and general engagement: 10%

Jump-start presentation: 5%

Reading responses: 25%

Paper #1 (write your own midrash): 25%

Paper #2 (comparing canons): 35%

Please be advised that I may make minor changes to this syllabus during the course of the semester.

Resources

All course readings and other resources will be available on Canvas or otherwise online.

Academic Integrity

Students in this class are expected to maintain academic integrity; academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. JTS Student Disciplinary Procedures can be found at:

http://my.jtsa.edu/ICS/Policies/Student_Disciplinary_Procedures.jnz

JTS students are expected to bear sole responsibility for their work, to learn the rules and definitions that underlie the practice of academic integrity, and to uphold its ideals.

Students with Disabilities

JTS is committed to accommodating students with disabilities. The JTS policy on disabilities may be found at: http://my.jtsa.edu/ICS/Policies/Students_with_Disabilities.jnz

Course Schedule

1. Sept 4: Introductions

2. Sept 9: What is a Canon?

Moshe Halbertal, *People of the Book*, excerpts

J. Z. Smith, *From Babylon to Jonestown*, Ch 4

3. Sept 11: Sources of the Torah

Genesis 1-3

Joel Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch*, Introduction and Ch 1

4. Sept 16: Sources of the Torah II

Exodus 20:24, Deuteronomy 12

Bernard Levinson, *Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutics of Legal Innovation*, Ch 5

5. Sept 18: The Pentateuch

Deuteronomy 31-34

Joshua 1

Marc Brettler, "Is the Torah a Pentateuch" (<https://thetorah.com/is-the-torah-a-pentateuch/>)

6. Sept 23: The Tanakh, I

I Chronicles 10:1-11:9, I Samuel 28-31, II Samuel 3, 5:1-6

I Chronicles 20, I Samuel 17, II Samuel 11

I Chronicles 28-29, I Kings 1-2

II Chronicles 33, II Kings 21

Yair Zakovitch, "Inner-biblical Interpretation"

7. Sept 25: Mosaic Law

Nehemiah 8-10

Hindy Najman, "Torah of Moses: Pseudonymous Attribution in Second Temple Writing"

Sept 30 – no class (Rosh Hashanah)

8. Oct 2: The Tanakh, II

Nahum Sarna, “Ancient Libraries and the Ordering of Biblical Books”

Timothy Lim, “Understanding the Emergence of the Jewish Canon,”

<https://www.ancientjewreview.com/articles/2015/12/1/understanding-the-emergence-of-the-jewish-canon>

9. Oct 7: Canon and Holiness

Mishnah Yadayim 3

David Stern, “On Canonization in Rabbinic Judaism”

Oct 9 – no class (Yom Kippur)

Oct 14 – no class (Sukkot)

10. Oct 16: The Septuagint

Excerpts from the Letter of Aristeas

Babylonian Talmud Megillah 9a-9b

Selected examples from the Septuagint/Masoretic Text

Oct 21 – no class (Shemini Atzeret)

11. Oct 23: The Dead Sea Scrolls

Alex Jassen, *Scripture and Law in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Ch 2

Excerpts from the Damascus Document

12. Oct 28: Hellenistic Rewritten Bible

Genesis 1-2 and Excerpts from Philo, *On the Creation of the World*

Genesis 37-46 and *Joseph and Asenath*

13. Oct 30: The New Testament

Matthew 1-5 in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*

Luke 1-2 in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*

Nov 4 – no class (academic holiday)

14. Nov 6: The Mishnah

Mishnah Avot 1

Shaye Cohen, “The Judean Legal Tradition and the *Halakhah* of the Mishnah”

15. Nov 11: The Babylonian Talmud

Babylonian Talmud Menachot 29b

Richard Kalmin, “The Formation and Character of the Babylonian Talmud”

16. Nov 13: Midrash I

Steven Fraade, “Rabbinic Midrash and Ancient Jewish Biblical Interpretation”

17. Nov 18: Midrash II

Genesis 1:26-27, 2:21-22 and Genesis Rabbah 8

Genesis 4:9 and Genesis Rabbah 22

Genesis 22 and Genesis Rabbah 55

Genesis 39 and Genesis Rabbah 86

Rachel Barenblat, “Transformative Work: Midrash and Fanfiction”

Optional: <https://m.fanfiction.net/s/10847788/1/Goldstein>

18. Nov 20: Geonic Responsa

Elliot N. Dorff and Arthur I. Rosett, *A Living Tree*, Ch 8, excerpt

19. Nov 25: New Jewish Canon (Guest Lecture, Yehuda Kurtzer)

Midrash/rewritten Bible paper due

20. Nov 27: Medieval Textualization

Talya Fishman, *Becoming the People of the Book*, Ch. 4

21. Dec 2: Codes

Moshe Halbertal, “What is the Mishneh Torah”

Maimonides, Introduction to Mishneh Torah

22. Dec 4: The Halakhic Canon

Maimonides’ Letter on Apostasy

Haym Soloveitchik, “Maimonides’ *Iggeret Ha-Shemad*: Law and Rhetoric”

Topic for final paper due

23. Dec 9: Liturgy

Kedusha texts

David Stern, "The Anthology in Jewish Literature: An Introduction"

Joseph Tabory, "The Prayerbook (Siddur) as an Anthology of Judaism"

Final Paper due Thursday, Dec 19