

Memory, Ethnicity and Belief: Forms of Jewish Identity in Early Modern Europe

**Dr. Dean Bell (Dean/CAO, Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies, Chicago)
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
Department of History; Jewish Studies Program
History 345**

Thursdays, 1:00-3:50pm, January 22-April 29, 2004

Contact information: dbell@spertus.edu; 312-322-1791; fax 312-922-6406

Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description

Nestled somewhere between the “darkness” of the Middle Ages and the ambiguity of modernity, people of the “early modern world,” crafted complex, sophisticated and dynamic lives and societies. How did Jews of this period understand themselves within the context of external developments such as the renaissance, reformation, global expansion and scientific revolution, and internal conditions such as wide geographical dispersion, social polarization and wide-ranging customs, traditions and languages? Utilizing three central themes, this course explores the ways that early modern Jews identified themselves and their communities. The themes examined are: memory and narrative of the past; ethnicity; and, questions of belief and tolerated dissent.

Sought Learning Outcomes

- Understand the nature of community generally and the primary means of defining community in the early modern period
- Understand the general characteristics of early modern Jewish society
- Understand issues related to periodization in history
- Become familiar with the primary topics of early modern history
- Understand the basic processes of identity formation and development
- Understand the basic ways that early modern Jews formed community
- Consider various traditional historiographical positions regarding Jewish history and the development of Judaism
- Understand the complexities of Jewish and non-Jewish relations in the early modern period

Course Requirements

- Preparation of all course materials and participation in class discussions (15%)
- One 4-5 page book review—choose from among the three central books to be read for the course (due by session XII) (25%)
- Oral presentation (during sessions VII-IX) (25%)
- Final 10-15 page research paper examining one or more of the central course themes (35%)

Required Readings

Xeroxed Reader of secondary sources

Xeroxed Packet of primary sources [in-class]

Miriam Bodian. *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation: Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam* (Indiana University Press)

Steven Nadler. *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge University Press)

Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi. *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (University of Washington Press)

Each session will include some preliminary lecture and will incorporate background secondary and theoretical readings, and primary sources in translation intended for discussion. All readings should be prepared before class.

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW (Sessions I-II)

Topics:

Periodization

General Developments: Religion; Exploration and Expansion; Politics; Social and Economic Development; Cultural Shifts

Early Modern Jewry: Demographics and Social Structure

Jewish and Christian Relations

The Nature of Community

Identity

Examples of Early Modern Community

Session I The Early Modern Period: Scope and Settlement (January 22)

Background Readings:

Theodore Rabb, *The Struggle for Stability in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 3-34 [Reader]

Ivan Marcus, "Medieval Jewish Studies: Toward an Anthropological History of the Jews," in *The State of Jewish Studies*, edited by S.J.D. Cohen and E.L. Greenstein, pp. 113-127; and response of Hava Tirosh-Rothschild, pp. 128-142 [Reader]

Sources for Discussion:

Comparative Statistics [In-Class]

Historiographical Accounts—handouts from the work of Salo Baron and Heinrich Gratz [In-Class]

Session II Community and Identity: Theories and Practices of Formation and Continuity (January 29)

Background Readings:

Jacob Katz, *Tradition and Crisis: Jewish Society at the End of the Middle Ages*, pp. 125-155 [Reader]

Jonathan Israel. *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism, 1550-1750*, pp. 1-71 and xx-xi (map) [Reader]

Dean Phillip Bell, *Sacred Communities: Jewish and Christian Identities in Fifteenth-Century Germany*, pp. 25-28, 91-96, 149-194 [Reader]

Sources for Discussion:

Solomon Freehof, ed. *A Treasury of Responsa*, pp. 41-46 (Meir of Rothenburg); 93-96 (Judah Mintz); 140-144 (Moses di Trani) [Packet]

Marc Michael Epstein, *Dreams of Subversion in Medieval Jewish Art and Literature*, pp. 16-38 [Reader]

Selections from the oldest Protokollbuch of the Portuguese-Jewish community in Hamburg [Packet]

MEMORY (Sessions III-VI)

Topics:

Medieval, Early Modern and Modern Memory

Questions of Nationalism

The Nature of Memory

Purpose of Memory: The Role of Memory in Community and Identity Formation

Forms and Expressions of Memory

History?

Session III: Notions of Memory (February 5)

Background Readings:

Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi. *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*

Sources for Discussion:

Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History*, pp. 3-21 [Reader]

David Myers, "Remembering *Zakhor*: A Super-Commentary," pp. 129-146, and Amos Funkenstein's response, pp. 147-148. [Reader]

Session IV: Uses of the Past (February 12)

Background Readings:

Mordechai Breuer, "Modernism and Traditionalism in Sixteenth-Century Jewish Historiography: A Study of David Gans' *Tzemah David*," in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, edited by Bernard Dov Cooperman, pp. 49-88 [Reader]

Natalie Davis, *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth-Century Lives*, pp. 5-62 [Reader]

Sources for Discussion:

Michael M. Meyer *Ideas of Jewish History*, pp. 122-132 (Selections from David Gans, *Zemah David*) [Packet]

The Memoirs of Glückel of Hameln, Selections [Packet]

Session V: Historiography? (February 19)

Background Readings:

Lester Siegel, *Historical Consciousness and Religious Tradition in Azariah de' Rossi's Me'or Einayim*, pp. 11-45, 153-161

Edward Fram, "Creating a Tale of Martyrdom in Tulczyn, 1648," in *Jewish History and Jewish Memory: Essays in Honor of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi*, edited by Elisheva Carlebach, John M. Efron, and David N. Myers, pp. 89-112

Sources for Discussion:

Azariah de' Rossi, *The Light of the Eyes*, pp. 81-100 and 296-304 [Packet]

Samuel Usque, *Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel*, pp. 38-40 [Packet]

Solomon Ibn Verga, "The Staff of Judah," in *The Expulsion 1492 Chronicles*, pp. 91-104 [Packet]

Joseph Hacoen, "The Vale of Tears," in *The Expulsion 1492 Chronicles*, pp. 105-111 [Packet]

Nathan of Hanover, *Abyss of Despair*, pp. 23-30 and 110-121 [Packet]

Session VI: Forms of Memory (February 26)

Background Readings:

Dean Phillip Bell, "Worms and the Jews: Jews, Magic, and Community in Seventeenth-Century Worms," in *Werewolves, Witches, and Wandering Spirits: Folklore and Traditional Belief in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Kathryn A. Edwards, pp. 93-118 [Reader]

Sources for Discussion:

Selections from the Pfersee Memorybook [Packet]

Shlomo Eidelberg, *R. Juspa, Shammash of Warmaisa (Worms): Jewish Life in 17th Century Worms*, selections from the *Worms Maasehbuch* [Packet]

Selections from the Friedberg Pinkas [Packet]

ETHNICITY (Sessions VII-IX)

Topics:

Internal Definitions

Spanish Expulsion and its Consequences

Population Shifts

The Ashekenazic and Sephardic Models

Exempla: Amsterdam, Venice, Hamburg, Constantinople

Session VII: The Question of Jewish Ethnicity in Early Modern Europe (March 4)

Background Readings and Sources for Discussion:

Thomas James Dandeleit, *Spanish Rome, 1500-1700*, pp. 113-121 [Reader]

Gershon Cohen, "Messianic Postures of Ashkenazim and Sephardim," reprinted in *Essential Papers on Messianic Movements and Personalities in Jewish History*, edited by Marc Saperstein, pp. 202-233 [Reader]

H.J. Zimmels, *Ashkenazim and Sephardim*, pp. 39-58 and 296-299 [Reader]

Miriam Bodian. *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation: Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam*, pp. 1-75

Session VIII: Ethnic and Communal Tensions (March 11)

Background Readings:

Miriam Bodian. *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation: Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam*, pp. 76-161

Sources for Discussion:

Selections from the oldest Protokollbuch of the Portuguese-Jewish community in Hamburg [Packet]

Session IX: The Examples of Venice and Constantinople (March 18)

Background Readings:

Benjamin Ravid, "The Venetian Government and the Jews," in *The Jews of Early Modern Venice*, edited by Robert C. Davis and Benjamin Ravid, pp. 3-30 and 249-256 [Reader]

Donatella Calabi, "The 'City of the Jews'," in *The Jews of Early Modern Venice*, edited by Robert C. Davis and Benjamin Ravid, pp. 31-49 and 257-259 [Reader]

Minna Rozen, *A History of the Jewish Community in Istanbul: The Formative Years, 1453-1566*, pp. 45-66 and 77-98 [Reader]

Sources for Discussion:

The Autobiography of a Seventeenth-Century Rabbi: Leon Modena's Life of Judah, translated and edited by Mark Cohen, selections [Packet]

Ibn Hayim, responsum, in Rozen, pp. 336-338 [Packet]

BELIEF (Sessions X-XII)

Topics:

Authority and Belief: Tradition

Historiography or Hagiography

Tolerated Dissent

Heresy

Bases of Faith

Customs

Spinoza

Herem

Conversion

Consensus

Controversies

Session X: Rabbinic and Communal Authority (April 1)

Background Readings:

Simon Schwarzfuchs, *A Concise History of the Rabbinate*, pp. 50-74 [Reader]

Daniel Swetschtinski, *Reluctant Cosmopolitans: The Portuguese Jews of Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam*, pp. 165-277 [Reader]

Sources for Discussion:

“Selected Rabbinic Appointments,” in Robert Bonfil, *Rabbis and Jewish Communities in Renaissance Italy*, pp. 331-335 [Packet]

Selections from the oldest Protokollbuch of the Portuguese-Jewish community in Hamburg [Packet]

Excommunication of Uriel Acosta [Packet]

Session XI: Tolerated Dissent and Conversion (April 8)

Background Readings:

Moore, R.I., *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950-1250*: 106-112 [Reader]

Talya Fishman, *Shaking the Pillars of Exile: ‘Voice of a Fool,’ an Early Modern Jewish Critique of Rabbinic Culture*, pp. 3-16 [Reader]

Elisheva Carlebach, *Divided Souls: Converts from Judaism in Germany, 1500-1750*, pp. 88-123 [Reader]

Sources for Discussion:

Kol Sakhal, pp. 81-105 [Packet]

Session XII: Spinoza (April 15)

Background Readings:

Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, pp. 1-154

Kellner, Menachem, *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought: From Maimonides to Abravanel*: 1-9 (220-224); 207-213 (285) [Reader]

Sources for Discussion:

Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, selections [Packet]

Spinoza, *Ethics*, selections [Packet]

Solomon Freehof, ed. *A Treasury of Responsa*, pp. 176-181 (Ashkenazi) [Packet]

CONCLUSIONS (Sessions XIII-XIV)

Session XIII: Reassessing Early Modern Jewry, Jewish Community and Jewish Identity; Community Dissolution? (April 22)

Background Readings:

Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, pp. 155-351

Gershom Scholem, “Shabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah,” in *Essential Papers on Messianic Movements and Personalities in Jewish History*, pp. 289-334 [Reader]

Michael Meyer, “Where Does the Modern Period of Jewish History Begin?,” *Judaism* 24:3 (Summer, 1975): 329-338

Sources for Discussion:

Selected letters regarding Shabbetai Zevi, in Gershom Sholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah, 1626-1676* [Packet]

Glückel of Hameln on Shabbetai Zevi [Packet]

Louis Finkelstein, *Jewish Self-Government*, pp. 257-264 (1603 German Synod) [Packet]

Menasseh ben Israel, "How Profitable the Nation of the Jews Are (1655)," in *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, edited by Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, pp. 10-17 [Packet]

Session XIV: Conclusions (April 29)

FINAL PAPER (Due May 13)