

Motherhood in Jewish Culture, Law, and Historical Experience

HDS 2021

Spring 2015

Mondays 1-4, Divinity Hall Room 106.

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Office Hours: Mondays 10:30-11:30 and by appointment

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A vast gap separates stereotypes of the nagging Jewish mother in contemporary popular culture from more traditional images of Jewish women as masters of the home, guardians of tradition. In this course, we will view Jewish motherhood from a variety of perspectives, using prescriptive and descriptive sources, biblical through modern. In the process, we will also learn about Jewish fatherhood, employ theoretical writing on gender analysis as a historical tool, and be exposed to the ways in which historians tease out women's voices when the written records of them are scarce.

Requirements:

- 1) Reading, and active participation in group discussions on that basis. If you need to miss class more than once, please be in contact with the instructor. Class participation also includes weekly graded responses in online forums about class readings or related topics to be posted on the course web site. 30%
- 2) A short paper, approximately 3 pages, consisting of analysis of a primary source: 10%. Due March 9.
- 3) A related research paper, including:
 - A. Discussion of topic with the instructor, submission of bibliography, proposal. Pass/Fail. Due Feb. 23.
 - B. Class presentation based on the research. To be scheduled. 10%
 - C. Submission of a complete paper proposal (details to be discussed). Pass/Fail. Due March 30.
 - D. Submission of a complete draft. 20%. Due April 20.
 - E. Submission of a final draft. 30%. Due March 11.

Work will be marked down by 3 percentage points for each day late, UNLESS prior arrangement is made with the instructor. I understand that people's schedules and lives are complicated; if you plan ahead and speak with me, we can work out adjustments as appropriate.

Readings:

Please read carefully, highlighting what **you** think are the most important issues, questions, points raised by the various authors as they relate to themes and questions raised in class.

A few course books should be in stock at the Harvard Coop. All readings will be available either on Reserve in the Andover-Harvard Theological Library or on the course web site.

Weekly readings and discussion topics are subject to change. If you miss class, please check with the instructor or a reliable classmate to learn of any deviations from the syllabus for the following week's class.

Course Outline:

1. January 26: Introduction

2. Feb. 2: Motherhood today & methodological introduction

Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, 11-55.

Andrea O'Reilly, "[Introduction](#)," in *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's Of Woman Born*, ed. Andrea O'Reilly, 1-23.

Chava Weissler, *Voices of the Matriarchs*, 3-50 (chapters 1, 2).

3. Feb. 9: Biblical Beginnings

Primary sources:

Selections from Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, Proverbs

Secondary sources: Susan Ackerman, "[Child Sacrifice: Returning God's Gift. Barren Women Give Birth to Exceptional Children](#)" *Bible Review* 9:3 (June, 2003).

Tivka Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), xiii-23 (Introduction and "The Hand that Rocks the Cradle: The Rivka Stories").

Feb 16: No Class

4. Feb 23: Rabbinics and Jewish Law

Primary sources: Mishna Kiddushin, Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 30b-31a, additional selections TBA

Secondary sources: Barry Holtz, *Back to the Sources*, 129-176 (Chapter 2, “Talmud”).

Meir Soloveitchik, “[The Jewish Mother: A Theology.](#)” *Azure* 20 (2005): 99-115

Marjorie Lehman, “[Dressing and Undressing the High Priest: A View of Talmudic Mothers.](#)” *Nashim* 26 (2014): 52-74.

Due: Paper topic with short bibliography

5. March 2: Christianity and Judaism: Mary the Jew

Primary source: *Toldot Yeshu*, selections

Secondary sources: Edward Kessler, “[Mary – the Jewish Mother.](#)” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 76,3: 211-223.

Ora Limor, “[Mary and the Jews – Story, Controversy, and Testimony.](#)” *Historein* 6 (2006)

Miri Rubin, *Mother of God*, 57-63.

Ephraim Shoham-Steiner, “[The Virgin Mary, Miriam, and Jewish Reactions to Marian Devotion in the High Middle Ages.](#)” *AJS Review* 37 (2013) 75 – 91.

6. March 9: Mothers in Medieval Ashkenaz

Primary sources: Elegies by Elezar ben Judah of Worms

Secondary source: Elisheva Baumgarten, *Mothers and Children: Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe.*

Due: Short Source Analysis

March 16: No class, spring break

7. March 23: Early Modern Europe

Primary source: Beth Zion Abrahams, trans. and ed., *The Life of Glückel of Hameln: Written by Herself*. (ebook available on Google Books).

8. March 30: From Europe to America

Primary source: Sholem Aleichem, *Tevye the Dairyman*, trans. Hillel Halkin.

Secondary source: Stephen Whitfield, "Fiddling with Sholem Aleichem: A History of *Fiddler on the Roof*," *Key Texts in American Jewish Culture*, ed. Jack Kugelmass, 105-128; Paula Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History*, 3-92 (introduction, chapters 1, 2)

Due: Paper proposal with outline (details to be discussed beforehand)

9. April 6 (3rd day Passover)

Primary source: Philip Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint*

Secondary sources: Paula Hyman, 93-169 (chapters 3, 4)

10. April 13: Jewish American Mother on the Small Screen

Primary source: Televisions selections, TBA

Secondary source: Joyce Antler, *You Never Call! You Never Write! A History of the Jewish Mother*

11. April 20 (Patriots' Day): Israeli motherhood

TBA

Due: Complete Paper Draft

12. April 27: Review and Conclusions

Final Paper Due: May 11

Have a great summer!