THE GREAT COURSES®

Philosophy & Intellectual History

Between Cross and Crescent:

Jewish Civilization from Mohammed to Spinoza

Taught by: Professor David B. Ruderman,
University of Pennsylvania

Part 1

Course Guidebook

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Professor Ruderman was educated at the City College of New York, the Teacher's Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, and Columbia University. He received his rabbinical degree from the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York in 1971 and his Ph.D. in Jewish History from the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, in 1975. Prior to coming to Penn, he held the Frederick P. Rose Chair of Jewish History at Yale University (1983–1994) and the Louis L. Kaplan Chair of Jewish Historical Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park (1974–1983), where he was instrumental in establishing both institutions' Judaic studies programs. At the University of Maryland, he also won the Distinguished Scholar-Teacher Award in 1982–1983.

He is the author of *The World of a Renaissance Jew: The Life and Thought of Abraham B. Mordecai Farissol* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1981), for which he received the JWB National Book Award in Jewish History in 1982; *Kabbalah, Magic, and Science: The Cultural Universe of a Sixteenth-Century Jewish Physician* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); and *A Valley of Vision: The Heavenly Journey of Abraham Ben Hananiah Yagel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990; Jerusalem: Shazar Institute 1997). He is co-author, with William W. Hallo and Michael Stanislawski, of the two-volume *Heritage: Civilization and the Jews Study Guide and Source Reader* (New York: Praeger, 1984), prepared in conjunction with the showing of the Public Television series of the same name. He has edited *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), *Preachers of the Italian Ghetto* (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), [with David Myers] *The Jewish Past Revisited: Reflections on Modern Jewish Historians* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), and [with Giuseppe Veltri] *Cultural Intermediaries: Jewish Intellectuals in Early Modern Italy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). His most recent authored works are *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995; Wayne State University Press, 2001) and *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key: Anglo-Jewry's Construction of Modern Jewish Thought* (Princeton University Press, 2000). He received the Koret Book Award in Jewish History in 2001 for the latter book. He is presently completing two books: the first dealing with Jewish and Christian identity in early 18th-century England, and the second, an interpretation of Jewish cultural history in early modern Europe. Several of his books have also been published in Italian and Hebrew translations.

Professor Ruderman is also the author of numerous articles and reviews. He has served on the board and as vice president of the Association of Jewish Studies, and on the boards of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Renaissance Society of America, and the World Union of Jewish Studies. He also chaired the task force on continuing rabbinic education for the Central Conference of American Rabbis and HUC-JIR (1989–1992) and the Publications Committee of the Yale Judaic Series, published by Yale University Press (1984–1994). He has just completed a four-year term as president of the American Academy for Jewish Research, the senior honor society of American professors of Judaic studies. He also has taught in the Graduate School of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York, the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and was a fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study at the Hebrew University. He was also director of the Victor Rothschild Memorial Symposium in Jewish studies for five years, a seminar for doctoral and post-doctoral students held each summer at the Institute for Advanced Studies, Hebrew University, in Jerusalem. He currently edits the series "Jewish Culture and Contexts" for the University of Pennsylvania Press. The National Foundation for Jewish Culture recently awarded him a lifetime achievement award for his work in Jewish history. He has lectured widely to university audiences, as well as to clergy, community, synagogue, and church groups. He was born in New York in 1944 and is married with two grown children.

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Between Cross and Crescent:
Jewish Civilization from Mohammed to Spinoza

Scope:

This course presents an overview of Jewish culture and society from its rabbinic foundations in late antiquity until the dawn of modernity in the 18th century. It focuses especially on the creative encounter between a rabbinic civilization shaped centuries earlier in the ancient Near East with the new social, economic, political, and intellectual environments of medieval Islam and Christendom. While casting its primary glance on the evolution of Jewish life over many centuries, it also affords a unique perspective from which to examine the three major Western religions as they interact with each other over time, especially their ability or inability to tolerate and even appreciate the "other"—as viewed from the vantage point of the Jewish minority.

After a brief overview of rabbinic civilization prior to the rise of Islam, the course focuses first on the Jewish community of Baghdad in the 9th and 10th centuries, a period in which a multitude of sources, including a special collection known as the Cairo *genizah*, provides a rich profile of the politics, social, and intellectual life of the Jewish community both within the environs of the city and beyond. The Jewish leadership is introduced, as well as its communal institutions, its forces of dissent, and its ultimate decline. The towering figure of Saadia Gaon of the 10th century is the focus of this intricate social and cultural world. The course moves from Baghdad to Cordova in Spain, examining the political and cultural developments of what some historians have called the "Golden Age" of Spanish Jewry, based on the explosion of new poetic writing in Hebrew as well as philosophical and legal works, especially those of Moses Maimonides and Judah ha-Levi.

From the Muslim orbit, the course then considers the long relations between Judaism and Christianity, from the Christian 1st century until the Middle Ages. After setting out the larger context of Jewish settlement in northern Europe, and the economic and social conditions under which Jews carved out their existence, the rise of Christian hostility is delineated, leading to the Crusades and the new aggressiveness toward Jews and Judaism. A close look at the new Christian offensive against the Jewish (and other minorities) in the 13th century, leading to their decline and eventual expulsion, provides the backdrop to understand the causes of medieval anti-Semitism.

While the course gives due attention to the political, social, and economic forces shaping Jewish culture in this long period, it focuses especially on the intellectual and cultural history of Jews in the Muslim and Christian environments and the modes of cultural interchange between Jews and their host cultures. I am especially interested in the emergence of two, distinct intellectual developments uniquely situated in the medieval world: the rise of medieval Jewish philosophy, on the one hand, and the appearance of Jewish mysticism and pietism as primary expressions of Jewish religiosity on the other. In incorporating both the history of Jewish thought and spirituality into this survey, I am obliged to be highly selective in the figures and movements I have chosen to highlight. But I do think that these choices convey accurately some of the salient features of Jewish civilization in its reconfiguration during the medieval period. The varieties of intellectual and cultural expression in Muslim and Christian lands, along with the social and political conditions under which Jews lived, allow one to see distinctly both the continuities and discontinuities of Jewish existence across the boundaries of these larger civilizations.

The last part of the course examines the decline of Jewish life in Christian Spain, leading to the expulsion of the entire Jewish population in 1492. It considers the new demographic, social, and cultural changes engendered by the Renaissance, Reformation, and Counter-Reformation, the printing press, the discovery of the New World, and the changing economic and political context of early modern Europe. It follows the explosion of new mystical and messianic movements in the 16th and 17th centuries, the impact of the Inquisition and the emergence of the new *converso* community based on unique economic, ethnic, and religious affiliations, as well as the remarkable growth and stabilization of new Jewish communities in Eastern Europe. The course closes with the emergence of the unique Jewish community of Amsterdam in the age of Spinoza.

Spanning over 10 centuries, this survey provides a broad introduction to some of the leading Jewish communities, their political and economic structures, their social relations with Jews and non-Jews, and their cultural and intellectual achievements in the pre-modern world. By embedding Jewish history within the larger social and cultural spheres of the Islamic and Christian worlds, the course ultimately raises the perplexing question of whether each of the three religious civilizations can learn to tolerate each other in our own chaotic and dangerous world, allowing each to live creative and dignified lives in the light of the mixed record of their past encounters and interactions.

Lecture One

On Studying Jewish History

Scope: The first lecture offers some preliminary observations about Jewish history in any period, as taught in an academic setting. This opening is almost identical with that of my previous course, but I strongly feel the need to review my approach here as well, given its obvious relevance to this course.

The most interesting and unique aspect of the Jewish historical experience is the landlessness of the Jewish community during most of its existence. The concepts of *homeland* and *diaspora* become, accordingly, central to understanding the particular evolution of Jewish political, religious, and intellectual life. Thus the problem of defining "Jewishness" is not merely a problem of modern and contemporary times but of centuries of Jewish existence. In understanding themselves, Jews have constantly had to ponder the question of spatial and temporal discontinuities in their long history. Without a common government, language, and land, in what way do Jews share a common history?

The academic study of Jewish history also requires us to spell out clearly and honestly our own approach to material that has often been treated with certain ideological presuppositions. In defining my own approach to studying Jewish history, I identify three previous approaches laden with ideological baggage that have left their impact on the study of the Jewish past: the traditional Jewish approach, the traditional Christian approach, and the approach of 19th -century founders of the academic study of Judaism. In exploring the biases and limitations of each approach, I seek to define a more neutral and critical stance toward my subject.

I close this introduction with a few thoughts about periodization, the conventional usage of the terms "medieval" and "early modern," and their advantages and limitations, especially when crossing boundaries between the Muslim and Christian worlds. My justification for using the term "early modern" in demarcating a unique era in Jewish history is also presented in preliminary fashion.

Outline

I. We begin our course by considering some general observations on the study of Jewish history.

   A. Jewish history, although interwoven with the history of world civilization, is unique in one respect: its landlessness.

        1. This uncommon aspect begins in 586 B.C.E. with the Babylonian exile. In 70 C.E., it becomes more uncommon with the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome and, by 136 C.E., it becomes even more uncommon and fascinating after the final defeat by Rome.
        2. Without a common government, language, or land, how do Jews have a history? Is there really a commonality between the united monarchy of Israel in its biblical setting and the contemporary united Jewish communities of the United States of America?
    - B. Although the problem of spatial and temporal continuity has long been real, Jews generally acted as a self-conscious and definable group. They acted corporately and were acted upon corporately.
        1. In the Middle Ages, Jews were more or less a legal corporate group, governing themselves by their own divine laws buttressed by governmental authority.
        2. Only in the modern period did Jews begin to acquire regular citizenship with no corporate rights or disabilities.
        3. Especially in the pre-modern world, the nature of Jewish religious affiliation was all-embracing. As Jews moved from culture to culture, they took their religion with them.
        4. In more recent times, both the sense of group consciousness and religious affiliation has significantly diminished for many Jews.
    - C. Jewish history is one of adaptation and synthesis with the larger cultures in which Jews lived.
        1. Jewish history cannot be studied in isolation from its general context.
        2. The Bible needs to be studied in relation to the ancient Near East, medieval Jewish thought as part of Islamic and Christian thought, and Zionism as part of the history of modern nationalisms.

- II. Three previous approaches have prevailed in the study of Jewish history. Each of these approaches has its limitations.
    - A. The Jewish traditional approach incorporates some basic assumptions inherent in the Jewish tradition itself.
        1. This approach assumes the linear development of history, a divine drama unfolding, culminating in the messianic era.
        2. Events occur because of the will of God.
        3. The Bible is of divine authorship.
        4. The exile is a condition caused by the Jewish people's breaking of the covenant, which will not be overcome until God sends the messiah.
        5. The notion of exile implies both a physical and a theological "casting out."

    6. This view dominated Jewish writing before the modern era, providing a theological explanation of Jewish fate and suffering.

  B. The Christian theological approach sees Jewish history as significant only as a pre-history of Christianity.
    1. Only until 136 C.E. did Jews have a real political and cultural history. Jewish history ends with the rise of the Catholic Church, the result of the rejection of Jesus by the Pharisees and later rabbis.
    2. Because the church is the true Israel, what happens to Jews after the rise of Christianity is insignificant and not worthy of study.
    3. As the historian Gavin Langmuir once argued, this view of Jewish history had great impact on secular historical writing at least until the 1960s.

  C. Jewish scholars of the 19th century, especially Heinrich Graetz (1817–1891), were methodologically limited as well.
    1. Graetz saw Jewish history primarily as a history of Jewish intellectual elites and the record of Jewish suffering, the result of the immoral actions of non-Jews.
    2. His history was clearly apologetic, attempting to show how Jews were entitled to full citizenship, that their culture was up-to-date and rational. What appeared out-of-date and embarrassing was often understated or distorted, such as the history of Jewish mysticism.

  D. A meaningful approach to the study of Jewish history must overcome the biases of these previous approaches.
    1. Divine causality does not offer the key to understanding how individuals, peoples, and institutions behave.
    2. Jewish history shares a common methodology with other histories.
    3. I certainly bring my own prejudices to the subject, because there is no such thing as objective history. But, at least, I attempt to be self-conscious about my own prejudices and to strive for objectivity and honesty in viewing the past.

III. In defining the periods of this course as "medieval" and "early modern," I employ conventional usages, fully aware of their limitations and ambiguities.

  A. When studying both the Muslim and Christian civilizations in the so-called Middle Ages, the latter term is problematic.
    1. The medieval period was a construction of historians who saw world history exclusively through the lens of Christian civilization in Europe.
    2. It is not so clear that Muslim civilization, in the centuries following Mohammed's ascendancy, can be labeled as medieval.

    3. Similarly, Jews living under Islamic rule need not be seen as fitting into a period defined by Christian culture.

B. The early modern period is a relatively new term employed by European historians in place of the terms "Renaissance" and "Reformation," but there is no obvious consensus on what it precisely means and its relation to modernity.
    1. From a Muslim point of view, the term is ambiguous when describing the Ottoman period.
    2. In Jewish history, early modernity is a term of even more recent usage and has not yet been fully defined even in recent historiography. By using the term, I do contend that one can distinguish it both from an earlier medieval and a later modern era.
    3. Some of the characteristics of this period especially relevant to the Jewish experience include the migrations of Jews and the creation of new Jewish communities, a new transformation in knowledge engendered by the printing press, and the blurring of boundaries both among Jews of different regional backgrounds and between Jews and Christians. We discuss these themes in our later lectures.

Essential Reading:

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

Jonathan Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism (1550–1750)*.

Supplementary Reading:

Michael Meyer, *Ideas of Jewish History*, pp. 1–42.

Review of Meyer by Jacob Neusner in *History and Theory* 14 (1975), pp. 212–26 (reprinted in Ada Rapaport-Albert, *Essays in Jewish Historiography*, pp. 176–90).

Questions to Consider:

1. Is there such a field as Jewish history, given the temporal and spatial discontinuities of Jewish existence? Can it be studied in the same manner as any national history?
2. In light of the ideological baggage previous students of Jewish history have brought to their subject, can the academic historian really address this human experience objectively and dispassionately? Does one have to be Jewish to fully understand the Jewish historical experience?

Lecture Two
The Rabbinic Legacy prior to Islam

Scope: Prior to the rise of Islam, Judaism evolved as a distinct civilization in the ancient Near East, living under the political rule of Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans. When the Jerusalem Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E., the Jewish community in Palestine was radically transformed. A large Jewish population was transferred from Palestine to Babylonia, creating for the first time a significant community of Jews living in the Diaspora. Over time, those who remained in Palestine experienced a growing complexity of their economy and society, urbanization, and eventual contact with the classical world of Greece and Rome. Over time, new institutions of Jewish life, focusing on law and ceremony, arose to meet the specific needs of Jewish life. Even with the rise of the second Temple, the synagogue now assumed a central role for all Jews.

With the growing complexity of Jewish life, new sectarian groups emerged during the Hellenistic period to interpret Jewish life and to promote their own claims to political and spiritual leadership. The most dominant group was the Pharisees, who substituted the rule of the rabbi for that of the high priest and argued for the legitimacy of a twofold law: a written biblical text and an ongoing study and elucidation of that text, both of which were deemed eternally valid. After the destruction of the second Temple in 70 C.E., this group assumed the leadership of the Jewish community in Palestine. Their heirs, the rabbinic class, continued to consolidate their authority over the Jewish communities of Palestine and eventually over those in Parthian and Sassanian Persia as well.

The rabbis left their stamp on classical Jewish civilization by their construction of a legal system and by their homiletic interpretations of the Hebrew Bible. The post-Temple Judaism that they constructed is preserved in the classic texts, which they left as a legacy to medieval Jews: *Mishnah* and its later elaboration known as the *Gemarah.* Together they were called the *Talmud*, of which two versions exist—one Palestinian and the other Babylonian. On the eve of the rise of Islam, the Jews had built a powerful civilization grounded in rabbinic law and exegesis, tolerated under the relatively benign political conditions afforded them under Roman rule, while flourishing under Persian rule in a prolonged state of cultural autonomy.

Outline

I. The transition from the biblical to the rabbinic age was gradual and evolved over centuries.

- A. The Bible records a small community whose economy was primarily agricultural and whose leadership consisted of the priests in the Temple.
- B. The area was relatively small since most of the population traveled to the Temple in Jerusalem to present their offerings during festivals.
- C. The destruction of the Temple by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E. marked a turning point in the history of the region.
  1. With large numbers of Jews exiled to Babylonia, a permanent diaspora community outside the land of Israel was created, even when some exiles returned to build the second Temple.
  2. In all likelihood, certain institutions such as the synagogue, the Sabbath, and circumcision already became important as unifying links in fostering the historical memory of an increasingly scattered community.
- D. During the era when Persians and Greeks, and eventually Romans, ruled the land of Israel, additional changes became evident.
  1. Palestinian society became more complex, more urbanized, with more economic divisions between rich and poor.
  2. The Greeks initiated a significant encounter between their civilization and those of the ancient Near East. This meant an intense process of Europeanization or Hellenization for those living in Palestine and throughout the lands that the Greeks had conquered.

II. The Pharisees and other sectarian groups offered responses to the growing social, economic, and political changes that the area had witnessed.

- A. The Pharisees claimed to be the legitimate interpreters of the Torah and to speak for the entire Jewish community.
- B. They promoted their teaching priests, whom they called rabbis, as the sole spokesmen of the community, replacing the priesthood both during and especially after the Temple was destroyed in 70 C.E.
- C. They claimed that God revealed his law in a written form (the Hebrew Bible) and in an oral form, which consisted of the rabbinic interpretations of the biblical text.
- D. The claims of the Pharisees were challenged by the Sadducees, Essenes, and other sectarian groups, but they emerged victorious after 70 C.E. when the Roman government made them the exclusive authority for determining Jewish law.

III. After 70 C.E., the rabbis gradually consolidated their power, first in Palestine and later in Babylonia.

A. In the aftermath of 70, the rabbis succeeded in presenting a uniform religious ideology and culture based on Pharisaic principles.
    1. The sacrificial cult was replaced by the worship and liturgy of the synagogue.
    2. The rabbis established the religious calendar and canonized the Hebrew scriptures, removing those books that they deemed controversial and unsuitable.
    3. They overcame all dissension within their scholarly class and removed the Judeo-Christians from the synagogue.

B. The heirs of the Palestinian rabbinate also settled in Babylonia, bringing with them the rabbinic ideology and institutions that they had established. Under relatively benign conditions, they flourished even more for hundreds of years.

. The legacy of rabbinic civilization in both Palestine and Babylonia was the Talmud.

A. The rabbis of Palestine collected their oral interpretations, organized them in subject categories, and eventually committed them to writing.

B. Judah the Prince edited the Mishnah, the foundation of Jewish law around 200 C.E.

C. The Mishnah became the object of study, interpretation, and elaboration in the rabbinic academies of Palestine and Babylonia.
    1. The rabbinic elaborations of the Mishnah were known as the Gemarah.
    2. Both the Mishnah and Gemarah constituted the Talmud, which appeared in a Palestinian version and in a larger Babylonian one.

D. By the 7th century on the eve of Islam, the rabbis of Babylonia and Palestine had left an enormous legacy to the Jewish community throughout the Middle East.
    1. In addition to the Talmud, biblical and homiletic works known as *midrashim* enriched the large corpus of rabbinic writings and co-existed with the two Talmuds.
    2. The eventual encounter between Judaism and Islam would emerge, first and foremost, in the epicenter of rabbinic institutions and creativity, in ancient Babylonia, which eventually became the site of the Islamic capital of Baghdad.

sential Reading:

c Meyers, "Jewish Culture in Greco-Roman Palestine," in David Biale, ed., *ltures of the Jews: A New History*, pp. 135–179.

iah Gafni, "Babylonian Rabbinic Culture," in David Biale, ed., *Cultures of Jews: A New History*, pp. 223–265.

Supplementary Reading:

Erich Gruen, "Hellenistic Judaism," in David Biale, ed., *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, pp. 77–132.

Oded Irshai, "Confronting a Christian Empire: Jewish Culture in the World of Byzantium," in David Biale, ed., *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, pp. 181–221.

Questions to Consider:

1. What were the factors that led to the transformation of a biblical culture into a rabbinic one? How did the Pharisees succeed in rewriting Judaism in their own image?
2. How would you evaluate the following statements? Rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity evolved in remarkably parallel ways, both re-interpreting their biblical foundations to create dramatically new religious ideologies and institutions. While claiming to represent the true biblical Israel, they had actually created new religious civilizations.

Lecture Three

The Beginnings of Jewish Life under Islam

Scope: With the rise of Mohammed's new religion in the 7th century, the conquests that followed, and the emergence of a huge Islamic empire under the Umayyads and then the Abbasids, the cultural environment under which Jews lived in the Middle East, in North Africa, and in the Iberian Peninsula was radically transformed. There is little evidence of Jewish life in the region of the Arabian peninsular where Mohammed lived both prior to and during his lifetime. His ambivalent encounters with Jews and his apparent indebtedness to Jewish lore and exegesis can be gleaned from several parts of the Koran and the *Hadith*, the oral tradition based on the latter.

What is clear is that early Islam was clearly in dialogue with the Jewish tradition from its very inception. Islam was also a religion based on a holy book and its exegesis. It was a religion based on religious law and the performance of divine commandments. Within its social hierarchy, Jews (and Christians) were considered *dhimmis*, that is, non-Muslim monotheists, with rights and privileges exceeding those granted to nonbelievers. Within the political structures the new Islamic governments established, Jews continued to enjoy a high degree of communal autonomy; Jewish leaders had access to Muslim seats of power; Jewish bankers and merchants could flourish economically; and Jewish intellectuals were exposed to the renaissance of classical culture that Islamic society created first in Baghdad and then in Andalusia (Spain).

With the rise to power of the Abbasid house in Baghdad by the middle of the 8th century, Jewish cultural and political institutions become more discernable in contemporaneous sources, both Jewish and Muslim. Situated roughly in the same area where the Talmud had been created centuries earlier, it was inevitable that the most profound interaction between Judaism and Islam would take place in this capital of the Abbasid reign and eventually throughout the vast regions under its control.

Outline

I. The rise of Islam in the 7th century dramatically transformed the societies and cultures of the Middle East including the Jews.

   A. Mohammed's flight from Mecca to Medina in 622 represents a critical moment in the early history of Islam.

    1. Medina was originally called Yatrib, inhabited by three Jewish tribes who rejected Mohammed's claims as the prophet of the new Islamic revelation.
    2. Mohammed's initial encounter with Jews and their rejection of him evoked a negative reaction on his part as recorded in the Koran.
  - **B.** From Mohammed's conquest of Mecca in 630 and for more than a century, Mohammed and his followers succeeded in establishing a vast empire, through military conquest, throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and Spain.
    1. After a struggle for power after Mohammed's death in 632, the Umayyad dynasty established its hegemony over Syria by the middle of the century.
    2. The Abbasids ultimately defeated the Umayyads, establishing their caliphate in Baghdad by the middle of the 8th century, as the Umayyads retained a rival capital in Cordova, Spain.

- **II.** The sources for the study of Jewish history under Islam are varied but mostly document the later period of the Abbasids.
  - **A.** The Koran and its oral traditions, the *Hadith*, offer a general picture of the Jews under early Islam, but it is a hazy one.
    1. Despite Mohammed's hostility toward Yatribian Jewry, he adopted many Jewish customs of worship; he seems to have been familiar with some doctrines and exegetical traditions of rabbinic Judaism; his religion of the book, written law, and its oral interpretations seem to draw inspiration from Jewish sources.
    2. Christianity does not have the same structure. With Paul and early Christianity, the old law of the Pharisees was replaced by a new covenant.
    3. Islam also drew on Christian sources.
    4. It saw itself as bringing together Judaism and Christianity into its realm.
    5. Most importantly, Islam was similar to Judaism in its focus on the practice of divine commandments and the study of a holy text.
    6. Mohammed's sources were probably oral, rather than the same written sources we have today. So it is difficult to identify Mohammed's specific Judaic sources.
  - **B.** Most of the documentation about the Jewish community first emerges in Baghdad.
    1. The rabbinic rulings, or *responsa* of the *geonim*, the heads of the rabbinic academies, especially a long responsum of Sherira Gaon of the 10th century, outlining the history of the academies, are important sources.

    2. There exist official governmental records in Baghdad regarding financial transactions with Jews, as well as some Christian and Karaite sources.
    3. The chronicle of Nathan the Babylonian provides a precious portrait of Jewish communal life, controversies, and intrigues in the 9th and 10th centuries.
    4. The treasure house of documents known as the Cairo *genizah*, a sealed repository of Jewish books written in Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic, and discovered only at the end of the 19th century, fills in dramatically the wider picture of Jewish life throughout the entire Mediterranean basin.

C. By the 9th century, a colorful portrait of Jewish life emerged in the Muslim capital and beyond.
    1. Jewish banking families dominated the economic and political life of the Jewish community.
    2. Jewish communal officials worked closely with the Muslim government, collecting taxes and ensuring the safety and security of Jewish inhabitants.
    3. Already in Baghdad, the degree of linguistic assimilation was striking. Jewish intellectuals mastered Arabic, and most Jews spoke and wrote in their own dialect of Judeo-Arabic. They eventually participated in the dynamic intellectual life of the capital and in its remarkable literary renaissance in jurisprudence, philosophy, and poetry.

Essential Reading:

Reuven Firestone, "Jewish Culture in the Formative Period of Islam," in David Biale, ed., *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, pp. 267–302.

Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, pp. 3–66.

Supplementary Reading:

Norman Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Source Book*, pp. 3–53, 113–120.

S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Genizah*, vol. 1, pp. 1–28.

Questions to Consider:

1. What accounted for the general level of tolerance of early Islamic society toward its Jewish minority? What accounted for the occasional outbursts of hostility and intolerance?
2. Was the rapid and dramatic acculturation of Jews within Islamic society—their economic integration, their political adaptability, and their

readiness to speak and write in Arabic—unusual or typical of most Jewish communities? How do you explain the comfort level Jews enjoyed in Islamic society and culture?

Lecture Four

Baghdad and the Gaonic Age

Scope: In the Abbasid capital of Baghdad, Jewish institutional life was controlled by the exilarch, an official claiming family lineage to the biblical house of David, and by two *geonim*, heads of the rabbinic academies of Sura and Pumbedita. All three divided their powers and responsibilities within the borders of Baghdad itself, but the geonim (singular, *gaon*), as academic heads of legal academies, claimed the greater allegiance of all of diaspora Jewry in determining matters of Jewish religious law. They also presided over academies of 71 members, highly centralized institutions controlled by an oligarchy of well-to-do families. Although these officials yielded considerable power, they ultimately answered to several wealthy banking and international trading families, especially the Aaron and Netira clans, whose ultimate authority rested on their close connections with the highest levels of the Islamic government.

Beyond Baghdad, a complex system of Jewish communal autonomy existed throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and beyond. Local communities had their own internal officials, who demonstrated their loyalty to the geonim in Baghdad, and who also ran a kind of diocesan organization throughout the Jewish world. The geonim not only competed with each other for sole allegiance but also with the rabbinic leadership of Palestine, who aspired to challenge gaonic hegemony. Another threat to rabbinic power, which became especially acute by the 10th century, was that of the Karaites, a sectarian group originally founded by Anan Ben David, which challenged the exclusive claims of the geonim and the Palestinian rabbis to interpret Jewish law. They deemed the interpretations of the rabbis as illegitimate accretions distorting the true meaning of the divine will, which they sought through their own traditions and their own re-reading of the biblical text.

Outline

I. The picture of Jewish communal organization in Baghdad is fully seen only by the late 9th and early 10th centuries.

  A. The primary leaders of the community were the exilarch (*resh galuta*) and the geonim.

    1. The exilarch claimed descent from the Davidic dynasty and a direct link to the earlier institution of the same name that existed in rabbinic times.

2. The geonim headed the two legal academies of Sura and Pumbedita and similarly claimed descent from these same institutions of rabbinic times.
3. While each of the three leaders had equal jurisdiction over the Baghdad Jewish community, the geonim saw themselves as the titular leaders of all of world Jewry and the ultimate authorities in determining Jewish law.

B. In the period of the geonim, the academies were highly centralized institutions.

1. The geonim were selected from a limited number of families who controlled Jewish communal life for hundreds of years.
2. Each academy had 70 members, plus the gaon. Seven *alufim* sat at the head of each of the rows.
3. Another assembly consisted of 400 students of Jewish law and considered itself as potential members of the academy.
4. The academy met only twice a year, so most of the power was centered in the hands of the geonim.

C. In the capital of Baghdad, a new class of Jewish bankers emerged whose economic role in the state made them powerful figures in managing the Jewish community.

1. The Aaron and Netira families were the wealthiest Jewish families in Baghdad, and ultimately they had their say as to who was appointed to communal office.
2. The families supplied huge sums of money to the state and were able to leverage their power at court into control over the political and religious life of the Jewish community.

II. The documents of the Cairo genizah allow us to see the larger picture of the gaonic age from the perspective of diaspora communities outside of Baghdad.

A. The geonim looked to the larger community for acknowledgement of their authority as well as economic support.

1. The geonim solicited funds and requested that local communities turn to them in determining matters of Jewish law.
2. They also channeled power through district authorities such as the *nagid* in Egypt.

B. On the micro-level, local communities in most large towns consisted of two synagogues.

1. Each synagogue maintained a loyalty to either Baghdad or Palestine and competed for members.

2. Each community consisted of various local officials who ran an elaborate structure of social services while maintaining loyalties to their supreme religious authorities located in Baghdad or Palestine.

III. Besides the competition of the Palestinian rabbinate, the chief challenge to Gaonic authority came from the Karaites.

A. The Karaite sect was founded by Anan Ben David in the mid-8th century, at about the same time as the Abbasid capital in Baghdad.

1. The sources about Anan describe him as a disgruntled leader who failed to be appointed exilarch or gaon.

2. A part of the law code he allegedly wrote, called the book of commandments, portrays early Karaism as highly ascetic, rigid, and less flexible than rabbinic Judaism.

B. By the 10th century, Karaism assumed a radically different character.

1. The Karaites of this later era were more rationalistic, more philosophical, and more interested in biblical studies and grammar. They focused more on interpreting the simple meaning of the biblical text, while relaxing some of the stringencies imposed by the early Karaites.

2. The Karaites of this later era appeared to galvanize their opposition to rabbinic Judaism around the figure of Saadia, whose diatribe against them seemed to have energized them even more.

3. Despite the ideological opposition Karaism mounted against the legitimacy of rabbinic law and the rabbinic exegesis of the Bible in favor of their own legal codes and readings, Karaites and Rabbinates lived side by side for centuries and maintained intimate social and political relations, as recent scholarship has shown.

4. One branch of 10th-century Karaites was called the "mourners of Zion" and insisted on returning to Zion and Jerusalem as a part of their Karaite identity.

5. In later centuries, Karaite communities relocated throughout Byzantium and somehow survived as distinct communities through the modern era, but always connected in some ways to Jewish communities.

Essential Reading:

Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, pp. 67–106.

Norman Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Source Book*, pp. 149–175.

Supplementary Reading:

S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Genizah*, vol. 2.

Leon Nemoy, *A Karaite Anthology*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Was the control of Baghdad's Jewish community in the hands of a powerful oligarchy of wealthy families any different from how other Jewish communities functioned in the past and presently? Did the interference of these families tarnish the religious and legal mores of the community?
2. Why were the Karaites so threatening to rabbinic Judaism and its leaders? Were the medieval Karaites at all comparable to sectarian groups in other religious communities, specifically the Protestants of the 16th century, in challenging the hegemony of the Catholic Church and its claim to absolute authority?

Lecture Five

Saadia Gaon and His World

Scope: Given the singular importance of Saadia Gaon (882–942), most of the sources that document Jewish life in Baghdad are connected to his life and thought. Following his meteoric rise to power and the internal struggles in which he was entangled offers a rich portrait of the community as a whole. Born in Egypt as an outsider to the Baghdad Jewish elite, he first gained attention by penning a diatribe against the Karaites in which he defended rabbinic authority. Arriving in Baghdad in 921, he immediately defended Babylonian supremacy against the claims of the Palestinian rabbi Ben Meir, who insisted that his colleagues, and not those in Baghdad, should determine the Jewish calendar. Ten years later, he was locked in a power struggle with the exilarch David Ben Zakkai as he attempted to assert his authority and that of the Sura academy he then headed. After a long and painful struggle, Saadia retained his leadership role until his death, although the corrosive effects of the controversy significantly weakened all of the Jewish institutions in the city. Saadia's fate, and that of his adversaries, as our sources clearly show, was ultimately dependent on those two banking families, the Aaronides and the Netiras, and their economic and political fortunes in the larger society.

Saadia's power struggles were only one dimension of his complex career. He was also an intellectual giant whose expanding horizons clearly reflected the dynamic intellectual ambiance of the Abbasid capital. He composed works on Hebrew grammar and poetry and on the Jewish liturgy. His biblical commentaries polemicized Islam, the Karaites, and rational nonbelievers. His most important work, *Sefer Emunot ve-Daot* (*The Book of Beliefs and Doctrines*), originally composed in Arabic, was the first major attempt to present a systematic philosophy of Judaism and is the subject of our next lecture.

Outline

I. The well-documented life and career of Saadia open a larger window onto his larger political and social world.

   A. Saadia's rise to power was indeed spectacular and meteoric.

      1. He was born in Egypt, and left his home for Israel at the age of 30, eventually arriving in Baghdad in 921.

      2. He was first noticed when he composed his anti-Karaite treatise in 905.

3. He joined forces with the Baghdad rabbis against the claims of the Palestinian rabbi Ben Meir over who determined the Jewish calendar in 921.
4. In 928, he became gaon of Sura, an incredible achievement for an outsider.
5. In 931, he challenged the exilarch David Ben Zakkai over a minor administrative matter that precipitated a major battle among the Jewish leadership of the city.

B. Saadia's famous conflict with Ben Zakkai was more than a personality struggle but was symptomatic of a larger social and political turmoil affecting Baghdad Jewry.

1. Previous historians have interpreted the controversy as a personal struggle, or as a struggle between right and wrong, or between the secular and religious leadership. None of these interpretations is accurate or sufficient.
2. Saadia's conflict with Ben Zakkai needs to be seen as part of an entire series of controversies within the internal leadership of Baghdad Jewry throughout the 10th century.
3. Throughout the period, various factions worked to undermine various exilarchs and geonim, beginning prior to Saadia's arrival in Baghdad and lasting way beyond his death. Only during the Ben Meir controversy did all of the contentious forces of the community consolidate to meet this external threat.
4. The narrative of Nathan the Babylonian, our major source for these controversies, clearly shows how the struggles signaled an institutional crisis of the entire community. It also reveals to what degree the controversies were orchestrated by the two dominant banking families—the Netiras and the Aaronides.
5. This Jewish crisis reflects a larger fragmentation of the Abbasid Empire by the middle of the 10th century, a shrinking of resources, the expansion of Karaism, the growing power of Spanish Jewry, and more.
6. In the period immediately following Saadia's death, the Gaonites saw its power gradually decline as the Abbasid Empire experienced a concomitant decline in its power and scope. In the end, the fate of Baghdad Jewry was clearly a minor reflection of that of the larger political and social world it inhabited.

II. Saadia's prolific career as a writer and thinker also allows us to glimpse the Jewish intellectual world of Baghdad in a period of dynamic cultural activity.

A. Saadia's literary activity was multifaceted and clearly reflected his polemical stances as a Jewish leader.

B. Saadia was an expert on Hebrew grammar and poetry and composed a work on these subjects.

C. His prayer book demonstrated his concern to systemize the rabbinic liturgy and to respond sharply to its Karaite critics.

D. He translated the Bible into Arabic and engaged rational skeptics, Muslims, and Karaites in his commentary.

E. Besides his defense of the Babylonian calendar and rabbinic law, he responded to a critic of biblical revelation who had posed some 200 questions against the divine character of the Bible.

F. His philosophy of Judaism is found in two works: a commentary on an ancient cosmological work, called *The Book of Creation*, and his *Book of Beliefs and Doctrines*.

G. His choice of Arabic as the written language of intellectual culture surely reveals the degree to which Jewish scholars were embedded within the larger culture of their day.

Essential Reading:

S. W. Baron, "Saadia's Communal Activities," in S. W. Baron, *Ancient and Medieval Jewish History*, pp. 95–127.

Rina Drory, *Models and Contacts: Arabic Literature and Its Impact on Medieval Jewish Culture.*

Supplementary Reading:

Henry Malter, *Saadia Gaon, His Life and Works.*

Robert Brody, *The Geonim of Babylonia and the Shaping of Medieval Jewish Culture.*

Questions to Consider:

1. Can you correlate Saadia's political career with his religious and intellectual writings? How does this religious sage function in a political context, and is this example unique or typical?
2. What happens when a Jewish intellectual begins to reflect on his Jewish identity in a language other than Hebrew? What is the place of translation in the intellectual life of the Jewish community, or any community?

Lecture Six

The Philosophy of Saadia Gaon

Scope: Saadia's philosophical work was a relatively new intellectual enterprise in Jewish culture. Written in Arabic, it clearly betrayed its indebtedness to a larger discourse, known as the *Kalam*, among Muslim philosophers who sought to define divine revelation along rational lines. In writing a Jewish philosophy, Saadia sought to defend the integrity of the Jewish faith not only against his Muslim colleagues but against those rationalists who questioned its veracity and against the Karaites who undermined the rabbinic underpinnings of the Jewish tradition.

Saadia opened with a discussion of the major sources of knowledge: sense perception, self-evident truths based on rational insight, and inferential knowledge based on the first two categories. He added a fourth source of knowledge, which he called "tradition," whose acceptance as truth is based on the first three sources and provides the only reliable orientation in reality that human beings can achieve. On the basis of this category of tradition, he argued for the truth claims of Judaism, a revelation publicly revealed and demonstrable rationally. Saadia further argued that reason and revelation are equivalent and that every Jew is required religiously to substantiate the essence of his beliefs through reason. Despite the apparent tensions in claiming a full identity between reason and revelation, Saadia maintained that rationality could always be subordinated to the higher truths of Judaism and made to buttress its authority even more.

Outline

I. Saadia wrote the first major work of Jewish philosophy.

- **A.** The notion of presenting a systematic presentation of Jewish thought was a relative novelty in Jewish culture.
  - **1.** The idea of writing *The Book of Beliefs and Doctrines* was suggested by the Arabic model of the Kalam, a rational accounting of Islamic revelation, and by the parallel need to present a similar accounting of Judaism.
  - **2.** In the context of an intellectual world of competing philosophies and religious ideologies, Judaism required an articulation of its basic premises and doctrines.
- **B.** Saadia began his work with an epistemological discussion of the sources of knowledge.

    1. Saadia's philosophy represented a quest for certainty, to overcome the doubts precipitated by his surroundings, and to regain a belief in reason and the authority of Jewish tradition.
    2. Knowledge for Saadia could be derived from sense-perception, from self-evident truths based on reason, and by inferential knowledge based on the first two. An example of the latter is that when one sees smoke without seeing fire, it is logical to conclude that fire is present.
    3. There is also a fourth source of knowledge, he argued, that of tradition. All cultures require traditions of cumulative knowledge by which we partake of an original experience based on the first three sources of truth.
    4. Without relying on trustworthy reports, no orientation in reality is possible. We rely especially on religious traditions, particular instances of the general principle of tradition.
  - C. On the basis of the fourth source of knowledge, the tradition of Judaism can be rationally validated.
  - D. The tradition of Judaism is a demonstrable fact, argued Saadia, since unlike other faiths, it was publicly revealed by an entire nation who passed down its experience from generation to generation.

- II. For Saadia, reason and Jewish revelation are equivalent.
  - A. Following the Kalam, Saadia argued that reason is capable of reaching through its own powers the content of divine truth, but both reason and revelation are necessary.
    1. Reason is needed to substantiate what has already been revealed. For Saadia, the acquisition of truth by rational means is a religious demand.
    2. Reason is also required for its polemical value to respond to the nonbeliever.
    3. Revelation is needed for those incapable of fully utilizing their reason.
    4. Revelation also provides an emotional certainty of faith that calculated reason can never provide.
  - B. Despite Saadia's assumption that reason and revelation are equivalent, certain tensions in this identification still remain.
    1. In Saadia's system, the believer must approach philosophy with the prior conviction of the truth of revelation. The task of philosophy is merely to provide a rational proof of what revelation has already maintained.
    2. Saadia's rationalism was both naïve and dogmatic, in not allowing autonomous reason to provide a serious alternative to revelation.

Its only purpose was to demonstrate the religious truths of the Torah.

3. In defining the categories of "rational commandments" and "commandments reached through obedience," Saadia apparently admitted the non-identity of reason and revelation. Later, Spinoza and modern Jewish thinkers would use the same distinction but argue that the rational/ethical commandments were superior.

C. Saadia's rational philosophy left a profound legacy on medieval Jewish thought.

1. His claim that the study of philosophy in Judaism was a religious demand resonated among later philosophers, especially Maimonides.
2. His "dogmatic" rationalism, insisting that reason and revelation were always equivalent, without acknowledging the limits of reason, would also be challenged later by Maimonides and others.

Essential Reading:

Alexander Altmann et al., eds. and trans., *Three Jewish Philosophers*, pp. 11–22; 25–47; 93–105.

Julius Guttmann, *Philosophies of Judaism*, pp. 53–94.

Supplementary Reading:

Samuel Rosenblatt, ed. and trans., *Saadia Gaon's Book of Beliefs and Opinions*.

Lenn Goodman, ed. and trans., *The Book of Theodicy by Saadia Ben Joseph Al-Fayyumi*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What do you think motivated Saadia to present a systematic philosophy of Judaism when almost no one before him had attempted such a project? Does Judaism have a philosophy, or did he create something entirely new?
2. Was Judaism enriched or diminished by the notion that philosophy is a religious demand? Does faith require rational justification? Is the Torah, or any religious revelation, fortified or diminished by an appeal to an external rational source of authority that confirms and legitimates its truths?

Lecture Seven

The Rise of the Spanish Jewish Community

Scope: Under the leadership of the powerful court physician, Hasdai Ibn Shaprut (905–75), who served the Umayyad caliph Abd al Rahman III in Cordova, the Spanish Jewish community began to assert its independence of the hegemony of Baghdadian Jewry. This shift from the authority of the gaonite to that of local Jewish authorities corresponded to a similar shift of power in the Islamic world. Hasdai's political power allowed him to function as the chief patron of the Spanish Jewish community and its principal spokesman to other Jewish communities. In the first role, he promoted the composition and recitation of both religious and secular poetry by accomplished Hebrew poets. Writing in Hebrew verse to distinguish themselves from their Arab counterparts writing in Arabic, they initiated a remarkable efflorescence of literary creativity for several centuries. In his second role, Hasdai corresponded with various Jewish communities in Europe and tried especially to establish liaisons with the king of the Khazars, an empire between the Black and Caspian seas, whose royal household had allegedly converted to Judaism by Hasdai's time.

The new Hebrew poetry affords an impressive window into a world of Jewish courtier elites. The poets were propagandists, celebrating and flattering their patrons, as well as influencing public opinion. They also gave voice to a new religious and social ideal. To be an educated Jew meant to know philosophy, science, and good literature. Rabbinical training was insufficient to the new Jewish intellectuals who imbibed many of the cultural values of the Muslim elites with whom they came in contact.

Outline

I. The Umayyad capital of Cordova rose to unparalleled heights by the 10th century.

- **A.** Under the rule of Abd al Rahman III (r. 912–961), the caliphate of Cordova rivaled that of Baghdad in its splendor and cultural vitality, creating inviting conditions for its Jewish minority living throughout Andalusia (Islamic Iberia).
  1. The caliph's physician and political courtier was Hasdai Ibn Shaprut whose own rise to power coincided with the enhancement of Jewish life in the capital.
  2. According to both Arabic and Hebrew sources, the ascendancy of Hasdai appears to have marked the growing independence of the Jewish community in Spain from that of Baghdad. It was in the

interest of the Muslim government to allow its Jewish community a degree of autonomy and to diminish its dependence on the gaonite of Baghdad.

3. An elaborate myth of Jewish settlement in Cordova and in North Africa described in a 12th-century Hebrew work written by Abraham Ibn Daud (ca. 1110–1180) proudly asserts the independence of the Spanish rabbinate and its ability to interpret Jewish law on its own during the patronage of Hasdai. This shift coincided precisely with the turmoil within the Baghdad Jewish community described in the last lecture.

B. Hasdai's patronage of Jewish poetical writing helped to shape a new cultural ideal.

1. As a courtier, Hasdai surrounded himself with Hebrew poets who flattered him, publicized his career in the public arena, and initiated a new cultural expression within the Jewish community.
2. Hasdai's two primary poets were Dunash Ibn Labrat and Menahem Ibn Saruk (both mid-10th century) who composed both secular and religious poems in Hebrew.
3. While Jewish intellectuals wrote prose in Arabic, as we have seen, they composed poetry exclusively in the Hebrew language to distinguish themselves from their Muslim Arab counterparts. They also perpetuated the tradition of Hebrew liturgical poetry called *piyyut.*
4. This Hebrew poetry was novel in its use of Arabic meter and its exploration of secular themes relating to nature, wine, court life, sexuality, and more. The Hebrew poets of Spain simultaneously satisfied the spiritual and mundane needs of their patrons and the larger community to whom they wrote.

C. Hasdai also saw himself as the political head of Andalusian Jewry and in that role represented their interests and those of Jews elsewhere.

1. Hasdai corresponded with the Jewish communities of Byzantine Italy, southern France, and Sicily.
2. Upon hearing of the Khazar kingdom in the southeast of Europe and the alleged conversion of the royal household to Judaism, he attempted to communicate with its king, Joseph.
3. The Hasdai-Joseph correspondence, apparently part real and part imaginary, reflected Hasdai's desire to locate and celebrate Jewish political power both in the East and the West and thus to assert a sense of Jewish pride, often diminished by the lack of Jewish polity in the medieval world.

II. By the end of the 10th century, the Umayyad dynasty disintegrated into a cluster of small city-states throughout Spain, and Jewish life reflected this growing instability.

  A. In this later period, Hebrew poetry continued to flourish.

    1. Samuel ha-Nagid (993–1055), politician, soldier, and poet, left an enduring legacy of remarkable poems for centuries to come.
    2. The 11th century witnessed the creative writing of such poets as Moses Ibn Ezra (ca. 1055–after 1135), Solomon Ibn Gabirol (ca. 1020–ca. 1057), and Judah ha-Levi (1085–1142), who left their mark both in the liturgical and secular realms.

  B. By the end of the century, Spanish Jewry was threatened by several radical changes.

    1. Andalusia was invaded by Berber tribes, the Almohades and Almoravids, who threatened the physical security of Jews in their paths.
    2. Christians in the north began their *reconquista*, reaching as far south as Toledo. They would fully reconquer the Iberian Peninsula only in 1492 but they transformed the conditions of Jewish life with their renewed presence.

III. From Hasdai's lifetime to that of Moses Maimonides (1135–1204), who left Spain by the mid-12th century, the so-called "Golden Age" of Spanish Jewry left its deep imprint upon the imagination of future generations.

  A. In the short span of several centuries, Spanish Jews had succeeded in creating a new educational and cultural ideal as the basis of their intellectual life.

  B. The poems, the philosophical works, and other genres of literary creativity testified to the bold aspirations of Andalusian Jews to be trained simultaneously in Jewish sources and in philosophy, science, and poetry. Rabbinic training was no longer sufficient; to be a complete Jew was to be conversant in two cultures and to integrate the two as well.

  C. The disparate positions of ha-Levi and Maimonides, to be discussed in our next lectures, represent two significant responses to this ideal and to its place in Jewish cultural life in this era and in subsequent ones.

Essential Reading:

Raymond P. Sheindlin, "Merchants and Intellectuals, Rabbis and Poets: Judeo-Arabic Culture in the Golden Age of Islam," in David Biale, ed., *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, pp. 313–386.

————, *Wine, Women, and Death: Medieval Hebrew Poems on the Good Life* and *The Gazelle: Medieval Hebrew Poems on God, Israel and the Soul.*

Supplementary Reading:

Ross Brann, *The Compunctious Poet: Cultural Ambiguity and Hebrew Poetry in Medieval Spain.*

Gerson D. Cohen, *A Critical Edition…of the Book of Tradition (Sefer ha-Qabbalah) by Abraham Ibn Daud*, especially the introduction and extended commentary.

Questions to Consider:

1. How does one explain the duality of a Hebrew poet who could celebrate God in one poem and the earthy existence of wine and women in another?
2. Why was the period of Spanish culture described in this lecture referred to as the "Golden Age"? What was "golden" about it for subsequent generations, especially for Jewish intellectuals as late as the 19th century who were enamored of this so-called Sephardic mystique?

Lecture Eight

Judah ha-Levi's Cultural Critique

Scope: Judah ha-Levi was one of the most talented of Spain's Hebrew poets. Written during the period of the breakup of the Umayyad dynasty, his poems, especially his odes to Zion, reflect a sense of growing impatience and disillusionment in the already shaky edifice of Spanish Jewry's political power and cultural élan, which were showing signs of significant decline by the early 12th century.

Ha-Levi's major philosophical work was the *Sefer ha-Kuzari* (*The Book of the Khazars*), originally composed in Arabic. In it he constructed an imaginary discussion among the Khazar king (the subject of Hasdai Ibn Shaprut's earlier correspondence), representatives of the three major faiths, and a philosopher, as a vehicle to present the truths of Judaism. Within the framework of this philosophical dialogue, ha-Levi offered a "defense of the despised faith," a defense against the intellectual assaults of Christianity and Islam from without, and against the spiritual erosion caused by philosophy and Karaism from within Judaism.

Ha-Levi strongly denounced the excessive integration of Spanish cultural values into the heart of Judaism as embodied in the Jewish courtier class. He decried the fusion of Judaism and philosophy. Judaism, he argued, was meaningful only in historical, not philosophical terms, and the ultimate religious experience could not be reduced to rational discourse. The land of Israel, not Spain, was the only location where Jews could fully live out their religious ideals and obligations, where prophecy could be realized, and from which the messiah would soon appear.

Outline

I. Judah ha-Levi (1085–1142) was a major participant in the elite Spanish culture of his day, but he was also its prime dissenter.

   A. His poems, both religious and secular, were a significant contribution to the corpus of Hebrew poetry written during the golden age.

      1. His odes to Zion, clearly central to his self-understanding, emphasize his emotional tie to the land of Israel, not to Andalusia and its Jewish culture.

      2. The Zion poems are not only connected to his major philosophical work but also help to explain his life dream to settle in the land of Israel, which he almost fulfilled.

B. His major philosophical work, *The Book of the Khazars*, also reveals his embeddedness in the Arabic philosophical culture of his day and his critique of it.
   1. Ha-Levi composed his book based on the information about the Khazar kingdom widely known since Hasdai's day.
   2. He speculated on how the king ultimately chose Judaism, constructing a dialogue among the king; a philosopher; and a Christian, a Muslim, and a Jew.
   3. Writing in Arabic, he showed a profound understanding of the philosophical and scientific currents of his day, as well as of Islam and Christianity.
   4. His goal was not an objective conversation but to present a platform of his theological understanding of Judaism.

C. His goal was to defend Judaism against the two other religions and against the Karaites, but primarily against the corrosive effects of philosophy and the courtier culture which surrounded it.
   1. The king was awakened by a dream which informed him that his intentions were good but his actions were not. The dream signaled a subjective, non-rational experience, which ultimately provided him with his most profound insights.
   2. The king ultimately found no sufficient response to his quest from his interlocutors, particularly the philosopher. He then turned to the Jew to defend his "despised faith."
   3. The Jew located God, not in rational speculation but in the experience of the Jewish people through history, in their ongoing experience with the Divine.
   4. Philosophy does not provide a sufficient answer to religious faith; faith cannot be reduced to a philosophical formulation.
   5. Ha-Levi was preoccupied with the notion of explaining how a chosen people can be powerless and suffering.
   6. He explained Jewish particularity on the basis of Aristotle's concept of the four essences, which are four categories of being—mineral, vegetable, animal, and human—and added a fifth essence—prophet.
   7. For ha-Levi, to be a prophet one must be an observing Jew and live in the land of Israel.
   8. The chosen status of the Jewish people was explained as a biological fact, located in its special path of powerlessness and suffering. The Jews alone possess the divine essence.
   9. The ultimate truth in Judaism is the moment of revelation at Sinai. Philosophical notions of God are mere verbal constructions that never approach this truth.

10. A Jew fulfils his life, for ha-Levi, by fulfilling the divine commandments, especially that of living in the land of Israel.

II. Ha-Levi left an enormous legacy in Jewish thought.

- **A.** His theology of Judaism placed him in opposition to the regnant philosophical currents of his day and to the positive image of Spanish Jewish life celebrated by many of his co-religionists.
- **B.** His departure for Israel was the culmination of his position that the Jewish people would fulfill their hopes not in Spain but in their Holy Land.
- **C.** His stress on the distinction between the philosophical ideal and the authentic religious experience resonated widely among later Jewish thinkers from his own time through the 20th century. It was especially significant to thinkers such as Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig who, like ha-Levi, were disenchanted with the excessive reliance on rationalism in Jewish culture.
- **D.** His rationale of Jewish existence inspired his readers who had internalized the polemics of the other Western religions: that sovereignty and power were reflections of the truth of their respective religions. He located a virtue in powerlessness.
- **E.** Although he never repudiated completely his Judeo-Arabic cultural background, he was perceived by many thinkers, especially in the modern era, as Maimonides' polar opposite, offering an "inner-directed" definition of Jewish identity in contrast to Maimonides' "outer-directed" understanding.

Essential Reading:

S. W. Baron, "Yehudah ha-Levi: An Answer to a Historical Challenge," S. W. in Baron, *Ancient and Medieval Jewish History*, pp. 129–148.

Isaac Heinemann, in Altmann et al., eds. and trans., *Three Jewish Philosophers*, pp. 27–41; 72–75; 116–119; 126–129.

Supplementary Reading:

Judah ha-Levi, *The Kuzari: An Argument for the Faith of Israel*, introduction by Henry Slonimsky.

———, *On the Sea*, translated by Gabriel Levin.

Questions to Consider:

1. How would you define the essence of ha-Levi's critique of the Jewish philosophical tradition? What was dangerous to him about its assumptions from the perspective of Jewish faith? Did ha-Levi reject philosophy altogether?

2. Why was ha-Levi's legacy so great among later Jewish thinkers from medieval times to the present? What especially was attractive about him for 19th century thinkers such as Heine, for Zionist thinkers, and for post-modernists challenging the previous directions of modern Jewish rational thought?

Lecture Nine

Moses Maimonides's Philosophy of Judaism

Scope: Moses Maimonides was the dominant cultural figure within the Jewish world of his day and for centuries following his death. Forced to flee Spain in his youth, he wandered through North Africa, eventually settling in Cairo where he was appointed house physician to the vizier of Egypt. His writings reflect a three-pronged intellectual commitment that was also reflected in his daily life. As a physician, he devoted himself to patient care and authored scientific treatises on various medical problems. As a Jewish legal scholar, he composed a number of major *halakhic* (legal) works, of which his comprehensive code of Jewish law, called the *Mishneh Torah* (*The Repetition of the Law*), was the most important. As a philosopher, his masterpiece, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, originally composed in Arabic, achieved a revered status within the Jewish, Muslim, and Christian intellectual worlds.

In contrast to ha-Levi, Maimonides strove to realize the overall unity of learning, a unity of the practical and theoretical, of divine law and Aristotelian philosophy. Finding the simplistic and naïve rationalism of early philosophers such as Saadia wanting, he strove for a more honest and sophisticated confrontation between divine revelation and human reason. Judaism could not insulate itself from the larger intellectual community; it needed to project a profile of "a wise and discerning people" (Deut. 4:7). For Maimonides, Jewish law was grounded in reason. Striving to comprehend that rationality with the aid of philosophy became for him the supreme religious ideal. Judaism's spiritual maturation as a religious civilization was dependent, so he argued, on its mutual dialogue and interaction with the outside world.

Maimonides' death in 1204 precipitated a major debate within the Jewish community over the place of philosophy, rationalism, and the study of alien cultures in Judaism. The entire debate between ha-Levi and Maimonides ultimately involved the juxtaposition of two models of Jewish spirituality and two distinct cultural postures: an "inner-directed" one and an "outer-directed" one vis-à-vis Judaism's relationship to the outside world.

Outline

I. Moses Maimonides (1135–1204) represents the most towering figure of his age and the epitome of Jewish intellectual creativity under medieval Islam.

   A. His life and career illustrate both the high and low points of the Judeo-Arabic symbiosis.

1. He was born in Cordova but fled during the Almohade persecutions to North Africa and eventually to Egypt, where he settled.
2. He earned his living as a distinguished physician but was an amazingly prolific writer both on medical and Jewish subjects.
3. Among his major contributions to Jewish law was his commentary on the *Mishnah*, and his monumental code of Jewish law called the *Mishneh Torah*.
4. His philosophical work, the *Guide of the Perplexed*, evoked praise from his followers, criticism from its detractors, and was studied assiduously both in the Jewish world and beyond it.

B. In modern historiography, he has been the subject of numerous studies, both in the history of Jewish law and in Jewish philosophy.

1. Leo Strauss provocatively argued that there were two Moses Maimonides: the codifier of Jewish law and upholder of the normative tradition, and a subversive philosopher whose real intentions remain obscure in his writings except to those who penetrate their hidden language.
2. Most modern commentators, such as Isadore Twersky, have argued that one can integrate the philosopher with the legal scholar, that Maimonides' aim was to reconcile the two positions, and that his basic assumptions in his *Code* are the same as in his philosophical work.

II. Given the vastness of his writings, Maimonides' position as a Jewish thinker will be illustrated by three examples from both the *Code* and the *Guide*.

A. Maimonides' *Code* opens with a philosophical introduction to Jewish law.

1. In a particularly suggestive text (Talmud Torah 1:11–12), he follows a traditional Talmudic division of the curriculum of Jewish studies—that one studies the Bible for a third of his time, then Mishnah and then Talmud—and then subverts it.
2. In Maimonides' formulation, the last two parts are collapsed into one (Mishnah and Talmud), and the third part implies a deeper study of the philosophical assumptions undergirding Jewish law. This formulation is essential in understanding his pedagogic program for Jews.

B. In the *Guide* (3:25), Maimonides offers a famous metaphor of the palace.

1. Various people attempt to approach the inner chamber of the king, but neither the nonbelievers, nor the simple worshippers who

follow the commandments, nor even the rabbinic scholars can enter it.

2. Only the philosopher, the one who has reached the highest level of spirituality, enters the king's inner sanctum, that is, approaches the king of kings, God himself.

C. In the *Guide* (2:25), Maimonides tackles the vexing challenge of reconciling the biblical view of creation with that of Plato and Aristotle.

1. Unlike the Greek view, the Bible insisted that God created not out of a preexistent matter but from absolutely nothing.
2. Maimonides' solution, in contrast to that of Saadia, is not to prove conclusively that the biblical view is right. Instead, he insists that though it is right, human beings do not have the capacity to prove it one way or the other.
3. Maimonides' proof of inconclusiveness admits the limits of rationality: While God may be all-knowing, human beings are not.

III. Maimonides' position can best be summarized when comparing it with that of ha-Levi and of Saadia.

A. Both Maimonides and ha-Levi discuss the biblical image of Abraham in their writing.

1. In ha-Levi's image, Abraham comes to know God through experience, through "tasting and feeling."
2. In Maimonides' image, as an infant, Abraham cogitated, thought endlessly about the world, and became a philosopher.

B. Notwithstanding Maimonides' commitment to the philosophical ideal as a religious value, his stance was different than that of Saadia.

C. He recognized that an exact equivalence of reason and revelation was impossible to demonstrate, since there were limits to human reason. Only God was all-knowing.

D. The Maimonidean legacy in the realms of Jewish law and philosophy is enormous.

1. Despite the bitter controversy that ensued after his death between his followers and detractors, Maimonides' stature as a legal scholar ensured his place in Jewish civilization, even among those who feared his philosophy.
2. His commitment to interpreting Judaism in an Aristotelian mode, in a more subtle and nuanced manner than Saadia, became an example to other "outer-directed" thinkers who strove to interpret the Jewish tradition in dialogue with the larger cultures that Jews inhabited.

3. The ha-Levi-Maimonides dialectic between revelation and reason, between turning inwardly or outwardly in defining Jewish identity, continued to play a prominent role for centuries to come. One might argue that all subsequent Jewish thought is somehow an echo of this great medieval debate.

Essential Reading:

Isadore Twersky, *A Maimonides Reader*, pp. 1–29; 33–48; 64–65; 71–76; 222–227; 341–349.

David Hartman, *Maimonides: Torah and Philosophical Quest.*

Supplementary Reading:

Isadore Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides* (*Mishneh Torah*).

Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, translated by Shlomo Pines with an introduction by Leo Strauss.

Questions to Consider:

1. Can the positions of ha-Levi and Maimonides ultimately be reconciled? Which thinker best understood the nature of Judaism or proposed a more meaningful program for its cultural survival? Or are both thinkers' positions equally valid, despite the differences that separate them?
2. Why did Maimonides' death open a controversy that split apart the Jewish community? Why was he accepted as a legal scholar and a philosopher during his lifetime but later vilified by some Jews, who even burned his writings after he died?

I.

Lecture Ten

Jewish Beginnings in Christian Europe

Scope: Small Jewish communities first appear in Europe, strung out along trade routes, the result of a gradual, modest trickle of Jewish merchants, who eventually opted to settle in the regions they had crossed. By the 9th century, firm evidence exists to account for Jewish colonization in Western Europe. Individual charters mentioning specific Jews are extant from the Carolingian period, offering them imperial protection and the right to live "according to their own law." These charters, describing the Jew as a kind of royal vassal, established an important precedent in defining the legal status of Jews in Christian Europe who were classified universally as *servi camerae* (chamber serfs) by the end of the Middle Ages.

The emerging medieval church was not oblivious to the growing presence of Jews and attempted to socially segregate them and enforce their inferior status. But at least until the first Crusades in 1096, Jews enjoyed the relative security of economic stability, even owning land and slaves. They also were able to establish the beginnings of Jewish self-government, both in the Rhine Valley and in northern France. Out of this merchant community emerged individual scholars of Jewish law who, in turn, created academies of Talmudic study, a legal system of internal jurisdiction, and the beginnings of a system of communal authority and interconnectedness that transcended the local level, reflecting the emergence of what came to be called Ashkenazic Jewry.

Outline

I. Jewish life in Western Europe emerged gradually from the early Middle Ages.

   A. Jewish communities originated along main Roman trade routes throughout Europe.

      1. There was no one event or major catastrophe that provoked Jews to move northward and westward into Europe.

      2. With the division of the western world between Muslim and Christian empires, Jews exploited their natural abilities, their mobility, and their international contacts to become long-distance merchants.

      3. From the evidence of a mid-9th -century source, it is clear that one Jewish merchant group near Baghdad, called the Radhanites, carried on trade excursions across the Mediterranean basin.

B. Scanty evidence exists confirming that Charlemagne and Louis the Pious, from the 9th century, made special efforts to attract Jewish traders to their northern French and German possessions.

   1. Three imperial charters are extant from the time of Louis, promising individual Jews protection for their lives and property, and the opportunity to live "according to their own law," and even to own land.
   2. These charters already established the precedent of a Jewish dependence and alliance with royal power.
   3. The language of these feudal charters represents the first stage in a gradual process leading to a legal definition of all Jews in medieval Christian society by the 13th century, when they were known as *servi camerae* (chamber serfs).
   4. These charters testify to a pragmatic relation between Jews and feudal lords, resting exclusively on mutual economic self-interest.

C. The Roman Church generally did little to interfere with these feudal relationships.

   1. During the Carolingian period, some churchmen did notice the advantages that individual Jews were receiving and sought to limit them as much as possible.
   2. Agobard, the archbishop of Lyons, sought to impose greater segregation between Jews and Christians in order to curtail Jewish influence on the Christian community.

II. The transition from settlements of individual families to fledgling communities also was gradual, but eventually led to the emergence of a noticeable communal organization and culture prior to 1096.

   A. The first Jewish communities to emerge were in the Rhine valley.

   B. In the 10th century, the communities drew their leadership from a single rabbinic authority named Rabeinu Gershom.

   C. In his academy, Jewish students studied the Talmud and interpreted the meaning of Jewish law within their new European context.

   D. The evolution from a community of merchants to that of significant rabbinic scholars and institutions was in itself a remarkable dimension of these small, evolving Jewish communities.

   E. Individual communities gradually assumed a regional identity called Ashkenazic. This came about due to the commanding presence, beyond their local communities, of powerful rabbinic leaders. It also evolved in response to the crisis that the Crusaders precipitated in 1096.

Essential Reading:

Cecil Roth, ed., "Economic Life and Populations Movements," in Cecil Roth, *The Dark Ages: Jews in Christian Europe, 711–1096*, pp. 13–48.

Simon Schwarzfuchs, "France and Germany under the Carolingians," in Cecil Roth, ed., *The Dark Ages: Jews and Christian Europe, 711–1096*, pp. 122–142.

Supplementary Reading:

Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times*, pp. 3–63.

Bernard Blumenkranz, "The Roman Church and the Jews," in Jeremy Cohen, *Essential Papers on Judaism and Christianity in Conflict*, pp. 193–230 (originally published in Roth, *The Dark Ages*, pp. 69–99).

Questions to Consider:

1. Why were Jews so successful as merchants and especially in international trade in the early Middle Ages? Is this acumen also noticeable in other historical periods? What were the advantages and disadvantages of the special royal privileges that they received because of these abilities?
2. How might one explain the amazing transformation from merchant to scholarly communities or the development of Jewish communities in the absence of developed municipal organization in Europe in general? How could the remote regions of *Ashkenaz* produce in a relatively short period of time such commanding rabbinic figures as Rabeinu Gershom, and later Rashi, the subject of a future lecture?

Lecture Eleven

The Church and the Jews prior to 1096

Scope: The foundations of church policy toward the Jews are to be located in the early history of Christianity, as narrated in the Gospels themselves. In attempting to make sense of the crucifixion, the Gospels argued that the religious leadership of Israel was responsible for Jesus' death and that the crucifixion represented the culmination of a series of crimes perpetrated by an unbelieving Jewish people. The Gospel of John served even more to encourage anti-Judaic sentiments by designating the entire Jewish nation as the children of the devil. In later centuries, church fathers continued to employ and embellish themes found in the New Testament to demonstrate the veracity of the Christian faith by underscoring the perversities and blindness of Judaism. Their *adversus Judaeos* writings emerged as an essential part of the literature of the early church.

Despite the often vituperative and excessive language of these writings, homilies against the Jews did not necessarily lead to a radical deterioration of their political and social status in the Roman Empire, even after the conversion of the emperor Constantine in the 4th century. The view of St. Augustine (345–430) eventually became the dominant theological view of the church toward Jews living under its domain. Rather than calling for their eradication or removal from Christian society, Augustine argued that they were not to die but rather were doomed to wander the earth as witnesses to the ultimate truth of Christianity. The Jews were to exist in a pariah status, always present to testify to the final triumph of the church. The attempt to enforce their separation from Christians and their social subordination in Christian society thus became the standard policy of the church of antiquity and of the early Middle Ages.

Outline

I. While hostility toward Judaism and Jews can be located in the pre-Christian world of antiquity, the rise of Christianity introduced a uniquely new factor into the history of anti-Judaism.

  A. The crucial turning point was the crucifixion of Jesus as depicted in the Gospels.

  B. The disciples of Jesus were faced with a crisis when their messiah expired on the cross. If he was, in fact, the messiah, why didn't he save himself as well as others?

C. To most Jews, the death of Jesus occasioned no miracles, no ending of an evil world, and Roman power remained firmly entrenched. For his disciples, however, this was an intolerable shock.

D. The disciples required a new explanation of the paradox of the crucifixion, which they constructed along the following lines: It was ordained that Jesus would suffer, be rejected by the official leadership of Israel, be killed by them, and rise on the third day and ascend to heaven.

E. The Gospels thus shifted the blame for his death from Roman political authority to Jewish religious authority. Their understanding was not a statement of historical reality but an act of polemic with the Jewish religious tradition.

F. The charge against the Jews arose out of a crucial need to make religious sense out of the crucifixion itself. This was best accomplished by reading back into Jewish history a pattern of an apostate Israel that always rejected its prophets and killed them, as described in the famous parable of the vineyard in Mark 12:1–12, and in Matthew and Luke.

II. The level of antagonism between the early Christians and the Jewish community became most intense by the end of the 1st century C.E.

A. The writings of Paul and those of the synoptic gospels accentuate the difference between true Christianity and an apostate Israel.

1. Paul emphasized the materiality of old Israel and the spirituality of the new one. He also emphasized the old covenant of Israel to be replaced by the new one of the Christian community.

2. The narratives of the crucifixion in the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) blame the death of Jesus on the Jewish religious leadership, its high priests, and Pharisaic rabbis.

B. By the end of the 1st century, the crisis was exacerbated by the so-called malediction against the sectarians issued by the rabbis of Yavneh and by the appearance of the Gospel of John.

1. Gamliel II, the head of the rabbinic academy in Yavneh after the Jewish war with Rome, ordered that a malediction be composed against the sectarians, allegedly the Judeo-Christians, virtually banishing them from the synagogue.

2. Not long after, the Gospel of John appeared, referring to the Jews as the children of the devil and placing squarely the entire blame for the crucifixion on the Jewish people as a whole—past, present, and future.

III. From the 2nd to the 6th century, an anti-Judaic literature emerged among the church fathers, and when the Roman Empire became Christian, elements of its teachings became the basis of social policy toward the Jews until the Crusade period.

A. The *adversus Judaeos* tradition was an essential part of patristic literature.
   1. This literature emphasized the rejection of the Jews and the election of the Gentiles and also stressed the inferiority of Jewish law and practice.
   2. The church fathers emphasized the theme of two peoples in the Old Testament, so that all negative judgments referred to the Jews and all positive ones to the Christians.
   3. The Old Testament, in this scheme, became a text for anti-Judaism, on the one hand, and for church adulation on the other.

B. Once Christianity became the state religion of the Romans, Christian theological utterances could be translated into social legislation against the Jews.
   1. The position of the church father Augustine of Hippo on the Jews became critical in determining their treatment in subsequent centuries.
   2. Augustine preached that the Jews had been decreed a life of misery for their rejection of Christ. Their pariah status was meant to offer testimony to their rejection and to the election of the church.
   3. The Augustinian position meant that Jews were to live miserably but not to be physically harassed or forced to convert. In the end of days, their blinders would be removed by Christ himself, at which time they would embrace the Christian faith.
   4. Canon law thus generally reflected Augustinian "tolerance" toward the Jews, insisting they be isolated and subservient to Christians, but generally left alone. This policy remained in effect until the onslaught of the first Crusades.

Essential Reading:

Rosemary Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism.*

Marcel Simon, "Christian Anti-Semitism," in Jeremy Cohen, ed., *Essential Papers on Judaism and Christianity in Conflict*, pp. 131–173.

Supplementary Reading:

Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity*, pp. 19–145.

John Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity.*

Questions to Consider:

1. What role did the Jewish-Christian debate play in the emergence of anti-Semitism? Is it legitimate to describe the theological hostility against Judaism in the early church as anti-Semitic?
2. How did Jews respond to Christian hostility? Did Jews possess an anti-Christian tradition in their theological writings? Did they have a need to put down Christianity in a way equivalent to that of Christians lashing out at Judaism and Jews?

Lecture Twelve

The Crusades and the Jews

Scope: In the year 1096, the pope called for a massive army of Crusaders to liberate the Holy Land from the polluted hands of the Muslim "infidels." Undisciplined and theologically unsophisticated, thousands of Crusaders gathered to "atone" for their sins and to do battle for Christ. The Crusader hordes swarmed dangerously across the European continent, constituting a major threat to the welfare and security of the communities in their path. To European Jews, especially those living in the Rhineland, the Crusader presence proved to be particularly alarming. For many Crusaders it seemed preposterous, so the Jews imagined, to set out on a long journey to kill God's enemies when his worst enemies, those who had allegedly murdered him—the Jews—were dwelling in their midst. Accordingly, some 5,000 Jews lost their lives during the first Crusade, some massacred by Christians, many more taking their own lives as martyrs.

The record of the massacres is preserved in three Hebrew chronicles, in Hebrew liturgical poems, and in some shorter Christian accounts. The chronicles and dirges, written much later than the events themselves, accentuate the singular response of the Jewish victims who chose to die as religious martyrs and even to glorify their actions. During their confrontation with the Crusaders, these Jews were depicted as openly revealing their willingness to testify to the truth of their faith and to repudiate Christianity by taking their own lives. The unconditional acceptance of martyrdom by these Ashkenazic Jews stands in sharp contrast to the emphatic warnings of Maimonides and other Spanish rabbis who counseled Jews in similar circumstances to escape or to accept forced conversion. Ironically, this Jewish behavior lionized in the chronicles appears to resemble that of Christian martyrs who chose to idealize death over life in similarly threatening circumstances.

Outline

I. The Crusades radically altered the status quo of Jewish-Christian relations in northern Europe.

   A. Pope Urban II's call for the first Crusade in 1096 to "liberate" the Holy Land from the Muslims had a direct side effect on the welfare of Jewish communities, especially those in Germany.

   B. The Crusade lacked disciplined leadership from either the papacy or from among the royalty who joined its ranks. It also attracted a wide array of individuals from all sectors of society, including common criminals.

C. The hoards of Crusaders who first gathered in France on their way to the Holy Land posed a direct threat to all in their path, especially the vulnerable Jewish communities of the Rhineland valley: Mainz, Worms, Speyer, and Cologne.

D. In the minds of some Crusaders and their potential Jewish victims, the Jewish "enemies" of Christ in their midst were as offensive, if not more so, than those who had polluted the Holy Land. The Crusaders for Christ had every right to strike out at each enemy.

E. As the Crusaders crossed the Rhineland valley and moved eastward, the normal means of protection afforded Jews by their feudal lords proved hopelessly ineffectual. Their protectors often fled themselves, fearful of the violence which the undisciplined Crusader troops could carry out.

II. The sources of the first Crusade's confrontation with the Jews have been interpreted in various ways by contemporary historians.

A. Three Hebrew chronicles, liturgical poems, and short Latin accounts document the Jewish atrocities.

1. The chronicles were written at least a generation after 1096, probably based on eye-witness accounts but embellished in a narrative with specific religious and literary aspirations.

2. The chronicles describe a variety of confrontations between the Crusaders and Jews in individual towns, including Jewish attempts to avoid the catastrophe, to bribe town officials to protect them, to protect themselves by hiding or fleeing, and when all else failed, to pray and fast for divine deliverance.

3. The primary focus of these narratives was to describe and to memorialize the heroism of the victims who—rather than expose themselves to Crusader violence or to the possibility of forced conversion to Christianity—chose to die as martyrs by killing themselves in the name of a religious ideal that they called *Kiddush ha-Shem* (sanctification of God's name).

B. In recent years, historians have debated the meaning of these horrific narratives.

1. Several historians have challenged the historicity of these documents—whether they describe actual events or are to be understood as literary representations of them, written from the perspective of survivors who lived several decades after the events themselves.

2. Those who refuse to read these documents as reliable testaments of what actually happened emphasize the homiletical and liturgical function of these documents, to be read together with the liturgical dirges that accompanied them.

3. Historians have also debated the meaning of the martyrological ideal uniquely lionized in this literature. How did men, women, and children take their lives when Jewish law had not demanded such a radical response? Had they imbibed the Christian martyrological ideal, or were they provoking God to take revenge on their enemies?
4. Historians also ask how Christians might have responded to the mass suicides that they witnessed. Their aggression had provoked the Jewish response, but were they not horrified by the extremes that the Jews then took to avoid their Christian oppressors?
5. One historian has even theorized that Christians seeing Jews murder their own children could also conclude that they were capable of doing the same to Christian children, and were thus implicated in the notorious blood libel that was widely disseminated by the 13th century.

III. The results of the Crusades on the Jewish community were significant and far-reaching.

- **A.** Jewish-Christian relations were significantly altered, although the Jewish community significantly recovered in the short term.
    1. Some 5,000 Jews were killed or took their own lives during the first Crusade, and smaller numbers died in subsequent ones.
    2. Organized Jewish life in the Rhineland communities was virtually wiped out for a considerable period of time.
    3. While Jewish communities eventually rebuilt and continued to survive under the relatively same legal and social conditions that had existed prior to 1096, a significant precedent had been set, namely, that Jewish communities could be physically assaulted. This precedent served to undermine the Augustinian policy toward Jews that had defined Jewish-Christian relations until that time.
    4. Despite the atrocities, 1096 did not represent the lowest point in Jewish-Christian relations, which came about some two centuries later through an even more wide-ranging and aggressive offensive against the Jews.
- **B.** The Crusades did have a significant impact on the development of Jewish culture and on Jewish self-perception.
    1. With the destruction of the Rhineland communities, rabbinic learning shifted in location from Germany to northern France, and its oral interpretative traditions were committed to writing.
    2. The ideal of *Kiddush ha-Shem*, as glorified in the chronicles and poems of the post-Crusade period, helped define the self-perception of Ashkenazic Jewry as well as the nature of Jewish-Christian relations for generations to come.

Essential Reading:

Robert Chazan, *In the Year 1096: The First Crusade and the Jews.*

Jeremy Cohen, *Sanctifying the Name of God: Jewish Martyrs and Jewish Memories of the First Crusade.*

Supplementary Reading:

Susan Einbinder, *Beautiful Death: Jewish Poetry and Martyrdom in Medieval France.*

Yisrael Yuval, *"Two Nations in Your Womb": Perception of Jews and Christians*, forthcoming in English translation.

Questions to Consider:

1. How could Jews commit mass suicide when rabbinic norms clearly did not condone their behavior? What does their singular response tell us about this special moment in Jewish-Christian relations and in the shaping of Jewish self-identity?
2. What can we learn from the historiographical debates about the use of the Hebrew chronicles of the Crusades, specifically about the nature of using historical documents and the nature and limitations of the historian's craft?

Timeline

622	The *Hijra*, Mohammed's flight from Mecca to Medina
622–624	Mohammed's unsuccessful attempts to win the support of the Jews of Yatrib (Medina)
630	Mohammed's conquest of Mecca
632	Mohammed's death
661–750	The Umayyad dynasty centered in Damascus
711	Muslim conquest of Spain
750–762	Accession of the Abbasid dynasty and foundation of its capital in Baghdad
ca. 760	Beginning of activity of Anan Ben David, founder of the Karaites
820–828	Letters of Agobard of Lyon written about the Jews
ca. 825	Louis the Pious's charters with individual Jews
ca. 905	Saadia's diatribe against the Karaites
910	Beginning of Fatimid rule in North Africa
921–923	Controversy over the calendar between the Palestinian Ben Meir and the Gaonim in Baghdad
928	Saadia Ben Joseph becomes Gaon of Sura
930	Saadia's struggle with the Exilarch David Ben Zakkai
929–961	Reign of Abd al-Rahman III and ascendancy of Hasdai Ibn Shaprut in Umayyad Spain
1085	Conquest of Toledo, beginning of the Christian *reconquista*
1094–1145	Almoravides rule of Andalusia and escape of many Jews
1140–1148	Conquests of the Almohades in North Africa and Jewish suffering

1096	The First Crusade is called by Urban II
1144	First instance of the blood libel in Norwich, England
1171	Blood libel in Blois recognized by the local government
1215	Fourth Lateran Council legislating Jewish badge and prohibiting immoderate usury
1240	Disputation of Paris
1242	Burning of Talmud in France
1263	Disputation of Barcelona
1264	First Jewish charter in Poland by Duke Boleslas Pius of Great Poland and Kalish
1280–1285	Composition of the *Sefer ha-Zohar* by Moses de Leon
1348	Black death attributed to a Jewish plot
1391	Pogroms in Castille and Aragon
1412–1414	Disputation of Tortosa
1449	First racial laws against *conversos* passed in Toledo
1480	Establishment of the Inquisition in Seville
1486	Composition of the *Oration on the Dignity of Man* by Pico
1492	Expulsion of the Jews from Spain
1497	Mass conversion of the Jews of Portugal
1516	First ghetto in Venice established
1520–1523	Publication of the first edition of the Talmud in Venice by Daniel Bomberg, a Christian printer
1540	Inquisition established in Lisbon
1553	Burning of Talmud in Italy
1555	Erection of the ghetto in Rome
1570–1571	Publication of Krakow edition of *Shulhan Arukh* of Joseph Karo with Moses Isserles' additions

1570–1572	Isaac Luria's years in Safed
1623	Establishment of Menasseh Ben Israel's printing press in Amsterdam
1648–1649	Persecution of the Jews in Polish Ukraine by the Cossacks
1665–1666	Self-declaration by Shabbetai Zevi as the messiah
1670	Publication of Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*

Glossary

Adversus Judaeos: The various anti-Judaic writings produced by the church fathers roughly between the 2nd and 6th centuries.

Aggadah: The nonlegalistic parts of rabbinic literature, stories, and homilies.

Almohades: A radical Muslim religious and political movement, originating in North Africa, that initiated persecutions and forced conversions against non-Muslims in Africa and Spain in the 12th century.

Antinomianism: Literally, "against the law," referring here to the radical stance taken against rabbinic norms by some of the followers of the messianic figure Shabbetai Zevi.

Anus, Anusim: The Hebrew term for the *conversos* or "*Marranos,*" literally meaning "forced ones," thus implying that these individuals did not convert to Christianity voluntarily.

Ba'alei Tosafot: The students of Rashi in northern France in the 12th and 13th centuries who composed comments, additions, and raised questions regarding his commentary on the Talmud. Eventually, their comments were printed on the pages of the Talmud alongside Rashi's commentary.

Blood libel: The notorious charge that the Jews murdered Christian children in order to use their blood to make unleavened bread on Passover. The charge first surfaced in the 12th century and re-appeared constantly in Christian communities through the 20th century.

Breaking of the vessels: The doctrine in the Lurianic *kabbalah* that when God created the spiritual prototype of the world, a crisis emerged, breaking the vessels storing the divine light and creating a catastrophe throughout the entire cosmos. It is the role of the Jewish people to overcome this crisis.

Burning of the Talmud: A reference to the decree of Pope Paul IV in 1553 to burn all copies of the Talmud throughout Italy. The Talmud had been previously torched in France in 1242 in the aftermath of the disputation of Paris.

Carolingian: A reference to the period of Charlemagne (742–814), king of the Franks and his successors.

Christian *kabbalah*: The study of the Jewish esoteric and mystical traditions by Christians, pursued especially by the Renaissance scholar Pico della Mirandola and his associates in Tuscany at the end of the 15th century, but attracting other scholars for centuries to come.

***Conversos*, (referred to negatively as *Marranos*)**: Jews who were baptized either forcefully or voluntarily in Spain and Portugal from the 15th century on, many of whom returned to Judaism by the 17th century.

Convivencia: The Spanish term used to describe the alleged ideal harmony achieved among Jews, Christians, and Muslims under Muslim rule in Spain/Andalusia from the 10th century on.

Council of Four Lands: The central body of Jewish self-government in Poland, together with the Council of the Land of Lithuania, from 1580 to 1764. The four lands included Great Poland, Little Poland, Podolia-Galicia, and Volhynia.

Counter-Reformation: The Catholic reformation, initiated by the pope, to counter the threat of the Protestant reformation of the 16th century.

Dhimmis: Jewish and Christian monotheists, living under Islam, who were treated as protected subjects by the rules known as the Pact of Omar. They were allowed to live under their own religion in exchange for paying special taxes and not offending Islam.

Diaspora: The area outside the land of Israel settled by Jews.

Doenmeh: A sect of adherents of Shabbetai Zevi who converted to Islam in imitation of the messiah's personal apostasy.

Ein-sof: Literally, "the Infinite," that part of the Divinity that human beings are incapable of knowing, according to the kabbalists who composed the *Sefer ha-Zohar*.

Enthusiasts: A term often associated with individuals who lived in the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe who arrived at what they considered the truth to be through their own rational or irrational powers, challenging the conventional mores of political, medical, or ecclesiastical authorities.

Exilarch: The Jewish official, who served with the *geonim*, as the leadership of the Jewish community in Abbasid Baghdad. He claimed ancestry from the house of David.

Fourth Lateran Council: The church council of 1215 that determined that Jews had to wear a special badge on their clothing and were prohibited from taking excessive usury from Christians.

Frankists: Followers of Jacob Frank, the radical follower of Shabbetai Zevi, who eventually converted to Christianity and advocated a radical, nihilistic stance toward traditional Judaism.

Gaon, geonim (pl.): The heads of the two major Babylonian academies of Sura and Pumbedita during the Abbasid period of Islamic rule in Baghdad.

Gemarah: The exegetical elaborations on the Mishnah by the rabbis who lived roughly between the 3rd and 6th centuries both in Babylonia and in Palestine.

Genizah: A cemetery or closed chamber for burying old Hebrew books. Usually refers to the famous archives of Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic manuscripts found in

Cairo at the end of the 19th century, revolutionizing the study of Jews under medieval Islam.

Ghetto: The enclosed, urban quarters restricted to Jewish residents, first appearing in Venice in 1516 and spreading throughout Italy in the later 16th and 17th centuries.

Hadith: The collected oral traditions of Islam depicting discrete parts of Mohammed's life, eventually collected and reduced to writing.

Halákhic: Pertaining to Jewish legal writing.

Hekhalot: Literally the palaces, referring to the ascent of the mystic to heaven and his vision of the divine palaces in ancient Jewish mysticism of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages.

Inquisition: A general reference to the tribunal of the Catholic Church erected to examine and try heretics. More specifically, it applies to the Spanish Inquisition of the 15th century, examining especially the alleged heresy of the *conversos*.

Kabbalah: The mystical and esoteric traditions of Judaism, which first appeared publicly in the 13th century in Spain and Provence and continue to flourish into the modern period.

Kalam: Generally, the discussions and debates in medieval Islam attempting to reconcile the Koran with contemporary doctrine and reason. It became the ordinary term for Islamic theology.

Khazars: A people of Turkic stock who established an independent and sovereign kingdom in southeastern Europe between the 7th and 10th centuries. During part of this time, the leading Khazars professed Judaism.

Kiddush ha-Shem: The sanctification of God's name, the ideal especially associated with the Jewish martyrs of the first crusade of 1096 who opted to kill themselves rather than convert to the Christian faith.

Koran: The sacred scriptures of Islam conceived as the revelation of Allah to his prophet Mohammed.

Legal responsa: Responses to legal queries written by rabbis from the early Middle Ages on to individuals and communities in search of legal counsel based on Jewish law.

***Marranos*, Marranism**: Literally in Spanish, "swine," a derogatory reference to the *conversos* originating from Spain and Portugal from the 15th century on, who were accused by the Inquisition of heresy.

Merkavah: Literally, the chariot mentioned in the book of Ezekiel, chapter 1, which refers to the early texts and fragments of ancient Jewish mysticism that describe visions of heavenly ascent.

Messianism: A powerful stream of classical Judaism, calling for the redemption of humankind by a personal savior and the return of the Jews to the land of Israel.

Midrash, midrashim: Generally denoting rabbinic biblical commentary and homiletics; also refers to a particular genre of rabbinic literature that includes both.

Mishnah: The legal digest of Jewish law edited by Judah the Prince; completed around 200 C.E., it serves as the basis of all subsequent Jewish law.

Mishneh Torah: Moses Maimonides's code of Jewish law composed in Hebrew in the 12th century, which became one of the primary summations of Jewish legal thinking and practice for medieval and modern Jewry.

Mysticism: As used in reference to Judaism, the doctrines and activities of those seeking a direct and unmediated connection or union with the divine source of reality.

Moriscos: Moors or Muslims who remained in Spain after the Christian conquest of Granada in 1492, forced to convert or to practice their former faith in secret.

Pharisees: A sectarian Jewish group emerging in Palestine in the first centuries before the common era, arguing for the sanctity of a twofold law, one written in the Bible and one oral, based on the interpretations of the rabbis.

Piyyut: The long tradition of liturgical poetry in Hebrew, first emerging in Palestine in late antiquity and continuing throughout the diaspora for centuries.

Pogrom: A massacre, riot, or other disturbance, officially instigated, referring especially to one directed against Jews.

Public disputation: The medieval spectacle of Jews publicly debating Christians, orchestrated to embarrass the Jews and encourage their conversions. The most important disputations were in Paris, Barcelona, and Tortosa.

Purity of blood (*limpieza de sangre*): A reference to a doctrine of racial purity emerging in Spain as early as 1449, justifying discriminating treatment of recent converts from Judaism and Islam who were not deemed legitimately Christian.

Radhanites: Long-distance Jewish merchants who originated in the district of Radhan near Baghdad and extended their operations as far as China and Spain in early Abbasid times.

Rabbinic Judaism or Rabbinic tradition: A reference to the beliefs and practices of traditional or classical Judaism constructed by the rabbis in the first centuries of the common era and accepted universally by Jews until modern times.

Reconquista: The reconquest of Muslim Spain by the Christians, beginning in 1085 with the conquest of Toledo and concluding with that of Granada in 1492.

Responsum, responsa: A reference to the rabbinic rulings composed by rabbis from the early Middle Ages until the present on specific cases of Jewish law requiring their immediate attention. This literature, also found in other faith communities, especially Islam, was an important supplement and elucidation of the legal tradition of Judaism as embodied in the Talmud and medieval legal codes.

Sabbateanism: The movement of the followers of Shabbetai Zevi who declared himself the Jewish messiah in 1665 but eventually converted to Islam, leading his followers to either despair in him or to interpret his bizarre behavior in mystical and nihilistic terms.

Sadducees: An ancient Jewish sect that challenged the views of the Pharisees, upholding only the written law of Judaism and accepting the exclusive authority of the priesthood over the rabbis.

Sefer ha-Zohar: The classic work of theosophical *kabbalah*, composed in the circle of Moses de Leon in Castille in the 13th century.

Sefirot: Those 10 aspects of the divine world knowable to human beings; the focus of the mystical commentary of the 13th century *Sefer ha-Zohar*.

Sephardic Jews: In the Middle Ages, the term generally referred to Jews living in Muslim lands, while **Ashkenazic** Jews referred to Jews living in Christian northern Europe. These categories blurred after the Christian conquest of Muslim Spain and after the expulsion of the Jews from Iberia at the end of the 15th century.

Servi camerae: Literally, chamber or royal serfs; the term defined the legal status of Jews in the Middle Ages, appearing first in the Holy Roman Empire in the 13th century.

Synoptic gospels: The first three gospels—Mark, Matthew, and Luke—of the New Testament, presenting the same narrative of the life and death of Jesus, as opposed to the fourth Gospel of John.

Talmud: The body of rabbinic literature, appearing in both a Palestinian and Babylonian recension, composed roughly between the 2nd and 6th centuries of the common era. The Talmud consists of the ***Mishnah***, a simple exposition of Jewish law completed in Palestine by the end of the 2nd century, and the ***Gemarah***, elaborations, discussions, and legal refinements of the **Mishnah** completed in subsequent centuries. The Talmud became the primary text of traditional study for Jews throughout the ages and was accompanied by many medieval commentaries in its printed editions, especially that of Rashi.

Tikkun: The doctrine in Lurianic kabbalah of the restitution of the divine sparks and the repair of the cosmos, to be brought about by the Jewish people itself.

Torah: Specifically, the five books of Moses, the Pentateuch, but generally Jewish sacred literature.

Biographical Notes

Note: The following notes include some key figures mentioned in the course outlines who are not major subjects of the lectures.

Isaac Ben Judah Abrabanel (1437–1508). Jewish statesman, philosopher, and biblical commentator in Portugal, Spain, and Italy. Due to his business and political connections, he was an influential figure in Christian circles in all of the communities in which he lived. He played an important role in trying to avert the edict of expulsion in Spain but eventually left, despite his prestige and wealth, for Naples. He wrote extensive philosophical commentaries on most of the biblical works, composed an extensive trilogy on the messianic passages in the Bible and rabbinic literature, and wrote an important commentary on the Passover Haggadah. He was well trained in classical literature and Christian theology and in the political world of his day. At the same time, he predicted the imminent coming of the messiah in 1503 and devoted much of his energy to messianic interests. He also wrote on Maimonides' philosophy, on history, and on political thought.

Abraham Ben Samuel Abulafia (1240–after 1291). Kabbalist and chief architect of the branch of kabbalah called ecstatic or prophetic kabbalah. Born in Spain, he traveled widely in Europe, especially in Italy, where he is said to have tried to arrange a meeting with the pope. He was fascinated by Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* and wrote a mystical commentary on it in which he fused the mystical and the rational. He was particularly interested in reflecting on Hebrew letters, especially associated with the Divine name, by which the kabbalist could alter his state of being to achieve union with God. The emphasis on mystical meditations, with a focus on altering the state of consciousness of the believer, as opposed to exploring the divine world of the *sefirot*, offered a clear contrast to the kabbalah of the *Sefer ha-Zohar*, often called theosophic kabbalah. Abulafia had a major impact on later kabbalah especially in 16th-century Safed.

Agobard of Lyons (779–840). Archbishop of Lyons and early writer on the Jews, he devoted six of his letters to the Jewish question of the 9th century. He was the first to complain about the Jews of his day, attempting to enforce the ecclesiastical principles of their subordination and lack of influence on Christian society. He was particularly upset about Jews owning Christian slaves, about the selling of their commodities in the public market, about the influence of their preachers, and about the positive image they had assumed in Christian society. He attempted to paint their religion as one of superstitions and conceits and to discourage social contacts between Jews and Christians.

Yohanan Alemanno (ca. 1435–1505). Erudite philosopher and doctor and Jewish teacher of the famous Pico della Mirandola. Pico interacted with Alemanno in Florence, even requesting that he explain to him the meaning of the biblical Song of Songs. Alemanno left extensive Hebrew writings on a wide range of topics. He was particularly fascinated, like his student, by Neo-Platonic philosophy and magic. He interpreted kabbalah in a Neo-Platonic key, bringing out the correlations among Jewish, pagan, and Christian wisdom. He elevated the study of magic in the Jewish curriculum and interpreted the biblical worship service in a magical way. His approach to kabbalah found a following among Jewish students in Italy, who continued to merge kabbalah with magic and philosophy for several centuries.

Uriel da Costa (1585–1640). *Converso* philosopher and free thinker who fled to Amsterdam from Portugal and attempted to return to Judaism. He discovered the Jewish beliefs and observances of the community practice to be at variance with what he considered Judaism to be. He wrote several works against rabbinic law, was excommunicated, and eventually took his own life. His troubled relationship with Catholicism and Judaism was recorded in an autobiography published some years after his death.

Anan Ben David (8th century). Considered to be the founder of the Karaite sect. The late rabbinic and Karaite accounts of his rise to power are unreliable. He seems to have emerged from a noble rabbinic family, was passed over for appointment as either an exilarch or *gaon*, and conceived the idea of founding his own religious sect that would be granted Muslim legitimacy. He composed the *Sefer ha-Mitsvot* (*Book of the Commandments*), a guide to religious law, which repudiated rabbinic authority and Talmudic tradition. He adopted a rigorous and ascetic approach to law, more stringent than that of the rabbis themselves. Despite his status as founder, some of his positions appear to be at variance with those of 10th century Karaite writers.

Nicholas Donin (13th century). A convert to Christianity, he led the attack against the Talmud in 1240 in Paris. He was originally a student of the Paris rabbi Jechiel Ben Joseph who excommunicated him. He compiled a list of 35 accusations against the Talmud, which led to the disputation of Paris, a public forum for these accusations. In this debate, he actually confronted his former teacher. He claimed not only that the Talmud contained blasphemies against Jesus but that it was heretical in shaping the people of the Old Testament into a different religion, that of the rabbis. The result of his efforts was the burning of the Talmud in France in 1242.

Dulcea of Worms (d. 1196). Wife of R. Eleazar Ben Judah of Worms, who memorialized her in a eulogistic poem after her murder by Christians. Eleazar's unusual portrait paints his wife as an economic supporter of the household and as a partner in running a school in their home where she actually taught women. He considered her a pietist in her own right, learned in Jewish sources, and an expert on liturgical recitation. Dulcea, who made ritual fringes for prayer shawls among her many everyday activities, was also an expert on Jewish law in matters pertaining to the household. Eleazar's love for his wife is beautifully portrayed in his poem, which also demonstrates the degree to which exceptional women could excel within the norms of a patriarchal family structure in the Middle Ages.

Jacob Frank (1726–1791). Founder of a sect called the Frankists, representing the last and most radical stage of the Sabbatean movement, originating from the messiahship and eventual conversion of Shabbetai Zevi to Islam in the previous century. Frank had personal contact with extremists of this movement in the Ottoman Empire. On his return to Poland, he preached a nihilist ideology overturning the norms and practices of traditional Judaism. He considered himself as the messiah, empowered to destroy rabbinic Judaism in the name of his own principles. He and a group of his followers eventually converted to Christianity, although he was soon arrested by the Inquisition for his heretical tendencies. His followers engendered a crisis and fear within the organized Jewish community and some continued to follow revolutionary religious and political paths well into the next century.

Rabeinu Gershom Ben Judah Me'or Ha-Golah (ca. 960–1028). One of the first rabbinic scholars in medieval northern Europe and founder of the rabbinic academy in Mainz. His exegesis on the Talmud and his various legal enactments called *takkanot* established the foundations of Ashkenazic communal and intellectual life for generations to come.

Moses Ben Israel Isserles (1525–1572). Rabbi and codifier of Krakow. He was deeply committed to the study of the Talmud but also had an appreciation for secular knowledge, especially astronomy. He wrote extensive notes on Joseph Karo's rabbinic commentary and added critical glosses to the latter's code of Jewish law. Through his notes, published together with Karo's work in Krakow, he gained acceptance for this Sephardic code among Ashkenazic Jews. In his *Torat ha-Olah,* he attempted to reconcile philosophical and kabbalistic language. He engendered considerable opposition from some of his contemporaries on his advocacy of Polish Jewish custom and for his codification of the law in print, which severely arrested the fluidity and influence of contemporary rabbis who were now subservient to a book.

Joseph Ben Ephraim Karo (1488–1575). Legal codifier and mystic. He was raised in the Ottoman Empire, eventually settling in Safed where he was regarded as the leading scholar. His major legal work was the *Beit Yosef,* an exhaustive commentary on a previous legal code called the *Arba'ah Turim* of Jacob Ben Asher. But he is most well known for his authorship of his own code, the *Shulkhan Arukh*, which became the authoritative code of Jewish law for all Jews, being printed in many editions. He wrote a commentary on Maimonides' code as well. He was also a kabbalist, composing a mystical diary describing his encounters with angelic figures. The complexity of his intellectual and spiritual preoccupations and his influence make him an important subject in understanding 16th-century Jewish life.

Moses Ben Nahman, Nahmanides (1194–1270). Spanish rabbi, leading Talmudic scholar, kabbalist, biblical exegete, and polemicist. Nahmanides was a major figure of Jewish life in Catalonia and took on the responsibility of debating Pablo Christianiti and defending the Jewish position in the famous disputation of Barcelona in 1263. Most of his written work consists of comments on the Talmud, but he also wrote sermons, a commentary on the Pentateuch, and a work on redemption called *Sefer ha-Ge'ulah*. He played a leading, moderating role in the dispute over Moses Maimonides' writings that flared up in the 13th century. While his biblical commentary was not explicitly kabbalistic, hints of his kabbalist interests can be located in the commentary, and he was considered by later students of the subject as one of the early "fathers" of this emerging field of study.

Nathan of Gaza (1643–1680). A major leader and ideologue of the Sabbatean movement. He was a significant kabbalist thinker in his own right and became the principal architect of constructing the Sabbatean ideology after Shabbetai Zevi's conversion to Islam. He initially met the alleged messiah prior to the public announcement of his messiahship. He counseled and encouraged Shabbetai, and played a critical role in publicizing his mission and message. During the long period of Shabbetai's incarceration, he wrote widely in many letters, explaining his apostasy in Lurianic terms, attempting to make credible Shabbatei's mission to those Jews hesitating to consider him the true messiah. Nathan's significance was in providing a theological legitimation in print of Shabbetai's bizarre behavior, including his apostasy.

Gershom Scholem (1897–1982). One of the most important scholars of Judaic Studies in the 20th century, and pioneer in the academic study of the Jewish esoteric and mystical traditions at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Scholem was clearly the most influential scholar to establish the philological and historical foundations of the field, exploring the beginnings of the kabbalah in antiquity until the emergence of Polish Hasidism in the 18th century. His many books, especially his *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* and his grand biography of the mystical messianic figure Shabbetai Zevi, were highly influential. Before settling in Israel, Scholem was a prominent intellectual figure in Germany, maintaining a close relationship with other intellectual figures such as Walter Benjamin and Martin Buber.

Jacob Ben Meir Tam (Rabbeinu) (ca.1100–1171). Grandson of Rashi, tosafist and leading Jewish scholar in France in the 12th century. He had a high opinion of his own leadership and insisted that his legal authority should be decisive throughout France. In addition to his many statements in the *tosafot*, he composed an important rabbinic work called *Sefer ha-Yashar*, which includes some of the many *responsa* he wrote. He also wrote Hebrew poetry, and on Hebrew grammar. During the blood libel at Blois in 1171, the year of his death, he played an important role in organizing a community-wide response to the tragedy.

Solomon Ibn Verga (second half of 15th century—first quarter of 16th century). Author of a historiographical work known as *Shevet Yehudah* (*The Scepter of*

Judah), consisting of a series of imaginary dialogues, embedded in a history of persecutions, which serve as a backdrop for exploring the contemporary tribulations affecting the Jewish people of his day. In a dialogue he created between a Spanish king and his secular Christian advisor, he reflected on the psychological and sociological reasons that Jews were hated. Ibn Verga found this neutral Christian scholar an effective spokesman for his thoughtful ruminations on the dynamics of Jewish-Christian relations in the past and present. As a partial attempt to understand the Jewish condition from a nontheological point of view, *The Scepter of Judah* clearly was a novel departure from most of the other works that conceived of the expulsion as divine punishment.

Hayyim Ben Joseph Vital (1542–1620). Leading kabbalist in Safed, disciple and colleague of Isaac Luria. He was responsible for committing to writing and organizing much of Luria's spiritual legacy, and interpreting it as well. He left Safed for Jerusalem and eventually settled in Damascus. Among his many writings was a collection of autobiographical notes called *Sefer Hezyonot*, including stories and dreams he had experienced as well as those of others. His multivolume work elaborating the teachings of Isaac Luria is called *Ez ha-Hayyim* and is divided into eight sections. Vital was more than an expositor of Luria. He also wrote a commentary on the *Sefer ha-Zohar,* following the system of the other important kabbalist of his day Moses Cordovero. He also wrote on magic, alchemy, and on the transmigration of the soul.

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Essential Reading:

Altmann, Alexander, Issac Heinemann, and Hans Lewy, eds. and trans. *Three Jewish Philosophers*. New York: Atheneum, 1973. Three ample selections of the translated writings of Philo, Saadia, and ha-Levi, with good introductions and notes.

Barnavi, Eli, ed. *An Historical Atlas of the Jewish People*. New York: Schocken Books, 1992. A wonderful atlas, time line, with notes on every period of Jewish history, beautifully illustrated as well.

Baron, S. W. *Ancient and Medieval Jewish History*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1972. A collection of some of the best essays of one of the most important historians of the 20th century, especially on the medieval period.

Baumgarten, Elisheva. *Mothers and Children: The Medieval Jewish Experience*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004. A new and important interpretation of a previously neglected subject, based on the author's doctoral dissertation.

Beinart, Haim, ed. *Moreshet Sepharad: The Sephardi Legacy*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992. The most authoritative summary of Sephardic Jewish scholarship, prepared for the 500th anniversary of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. Most of the contributors are Israeli scholars.

Ben-Sasson, Haim, and Samuel Ettinger. *Jewish Society Throughout the Ages*. New York: Schocken Books, 1971. An older history written by the leading scholars of some 30 years ago, and written from the perspective of Israeli historiography. Still valuable although outdated.

Biale, David, ed. *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*. New York: Schocken Books, 2002. The best one-volume synthesis we have, with a fresh and updated bibliography. The emphasis is on the new cultural history, so traditional intellectual history is relatively neglected. The essays by Gafni, Scheindlin, Marcus, Rosman, and Kaplan are gems.

Chazan, Robert. *In the Year 1096: The First Crusade and the Jews*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1996. An accessible summary of the events and the evidence, based on the author's previous research and on that of others.

Chazan, Robert. *Daggers of Faith: Thirteenth Century Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989. A useful summary of an important dimension of Jewish-Christian relations in the fateful 13th century.

Cohen, Jeremy, ed. *Essential Papers on Judaism and Christianity in Conflict*. New York and London: New York University Press, 1991. A valuable collection of essays providing a rich introduction to the subject until the Reformation.

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———. *Sanctifying the Name of God: Jewish Martyrs and Jewish Memories of the First Crusade*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004. Cohen's newest book is a radical re-reading of the Hebrew crusade chronicles, emphasizing their literary background rather than their historical accuracy.

Cohen, Mark. *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994. A very useful comparison between the Jewish communities under medieval Islam and Christendom. A helpful review and supplement to this course.

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Guttmann, Julius. *Philosophies of Judaism*. Garden City, NJ: Doubleday and Co., 1964. The standard one-volume synthesis of the subject, considerably outdated but a useful starting point for the beginner.

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Hundert, Gershon David. *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century: A Genealogy of Modernity*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004. A very important and up-to-date synthesis of Polish Jewish history, although one could take issue with his notion of modernity in reference to Jewish culture.

Idel, Moshe. *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988. His famous reconstruction of the kabbalah, the first to challenge expansively that of Gershom Scholem. A must-read after mastering Scholem.

Israel, Jonathan. *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism 1550–1750*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985. To date, the only serious attempt to define the parameters of early modern Jewish history, especially strong on political and economic history, while weaker on cultural and intellectual history.

Kaplan, Yosef. *An Alternative Path to Modernity: The Sephardic Diaspora in Western Europe*. Leiden: Brill, 2000. A recently translated collection of some of the most important essays by the leading historian of the *converso* diaspora in western Europe.

Kedourie, Elie, ed. *Spain and the Jews: The Sephardi Experience 1492 and After*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1992. Another useful collection on Spain written for the anniversary of the expulsion. Idel's revisionist essay is among his best.

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Saperstein, Marc. *Moments of Crisis in Jewish-Christian Relations*. London and Philadelphia: SCM Press and Trinity Press International, 1989. A small book summarizing recent trends in scholarship. Very useful as a teaching guide.

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Grossman, Avraham. *Pious and Rebellious: Jewish Women in Medieval Europe*. Hanover: Brandeis University Press, published by University Press of New England, 2004. The latest work of this senior scholar of Ashkenazic Jewish culture, based on a wide and deep reading of Jewish legal sources.

ha-Levi, Judah. *The Kuzari: An Argument for the Faith of Israel*, introduction by Henry Slonimsky. New York: Schocken Books, 1964. The standard translation of this classic work, soon to be replaced by a new translation still in progress. Slonimsky offers a thoughtful introduction to the work.

———. *On the Sea*, translated by Gabriel Levin. Jerusalem: Ibis Editions, 1997. A recent English translation of some of ha-Levi's poems. Other anthologies do exist on his poetry and those of his colleagues, including the Scheindlin volumes mentioned above.

Idel, Moshe. *Messianic Mystics*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998. A revisionist work addressing a major theme previously treated by Gershom Scholem. Idel sees various forms of messianism in the long history of the phenomenon. Original and provocative although a difficult read.

Kanarfogel, Ephraim. *Jewish Education and Society in the High Middle Ages*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992. An invaluable treatment of the culture of medieval Ashkenazic Jewry based on a thorough reading of Jewish legal sources.

Katz, Jacob. *Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times*. New York: Schocken Books, 1961. A classic study of the subject by one of the major social historians of the Jewish experience in the 20th century. Written from the perspective of the Jewish minority and based on rabbinic sources.

Liebes, Yehuda. *Studies in Jewish Myth and Jewish Messianism*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993. One of two small books of translated essays written by one of the most creative scholars of the kabbalah today, who primarily writes in Hebrew and is relatively unknown to those who cannot read most of his books.

Maccoby, Hyam, ed. and trans. *Judaism on Trial: Jewish-Christian Disputations in the Middle Ages*. Rutherford, Madison, and Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickenson University Press, 1982. Partial translations, summaries, and studies of the Paris, Barcelona, and Tortosa debates. Useful but not the last word on the subject.

Maimonides, Moses. *The Guide of the Perplexed*, translated by Shlomo Pines. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963. The authoritative translation by Pines with the provocative reading of Maimonides by Leo Strauss also included.

Malter, Henry. *Saadia Gaon: His Life and Works*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1942. The standard biography of the man, outdated but still useful in its comprehensiveness.

Marcus, Ivan. *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996. A small but stimulating book on one important ritual in the medieval Jewish world, studied anthropologically and comparatively, and offering a model for future research.

Meyer, Michael. *Ideas of Jewish History*. New York: Behrman House, 1974. (Review of Meyer by Jacob Neusner in *History and Theory* 14(1975): 212–26 reprinted in Ada Rapaport-Albert, *Essays in Jewish Historiography (History and Theory)*, Beiheft 27, 1988, 176–90). A useful anthology of reflections on the meaning of Jewish history from antiquity to the 20th century. Neusner's review is provocative and should be read and discussed together with Meyer's introduction.

Nemoy, Leon, ed. and trans. *A Karaite Anthology*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1952. The best anthology of Karaite works over several centuries in English or in any language. Nemoy's introductions are also valuable in situating the thinkers whom he presents.

Nirenberg, David. *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996. A fascinating exploration of some of the ways violence both facilitated and disrupted the co-existence of Muslim and Jewish minorities with the Christian majority in the 14th -century Crown of Aragon. The book demonstrates the complexity of explaining persecution in the Middle Ages.

Rosenblatt, Samuel, ed. and trans. *Saadia Gaon's Book of Beliefs and Opinions*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1948. The standard translation of Saadia's major philosophical work in its entirety.

Ruderman, David, ed. *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*. New York: New York University Press, 1992. A collection of some of the most important essays on the subject especially focusing on the first Jewish encounters with Renaissance culture and the shaping of Jewish culture in the era of the ghetto.

Scholem, Gershom. *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973. The classic biography of this complex historical figure and the early years of the movement surrounding his messiahship. Masterful and exhaustive.

Stillman, Norman, *The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Source Book*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979. An excellent presentation of Jewish history under Islam, together with a wide array of well-translated primary documents. Stillman has produced a second volume of his important work covering the modern era.

Stow, Kenneth. *Alienated Minority: The Jews of Medieval Latin Europe*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992. A synthesis and interpretation both based on previous scholarship and an original perspective on the sources. Leaves out Spain but offers broad overviews of social and cultural trends in the rest of medieval Europe.

Swetschinski, Daniel. *Reluctant Cosmopolitans: The Portuguese Jews of Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam*. London: Litmann Library of Jewish Civilization, 2000. An exciting and original interpretation of this epoch in Jewish history, based on the author's dissertation. An important contribution to the field.

Trachtenberg, Joshua. *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and its Relation to Modern Anti-Semitism*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983. Written originally in 1944, the work was an important contribution to the subject. Although it is most outdated and fails to properly contextualize its findings, it still represents a powerful summary of the composite portrait of the images of medieval Jews in Christian society at the end of the Middle Ages.

Twersky, Isadore. *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides (Mishneh Torah)*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980. The most important work of Twersky, based on a lifetime of study of Maimonides' legal work, demonstrating especially the philosophic dimensions of his treatment of Jewish law.

Weinryb, Bernard. *The Jews of Poland: A Social and Economic History of the Jewish Community in Poland from 1100–1800*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1973. Until recently, the standard English study of the subject. Although it is outdated and its interpretations have sometimes been challenged, it is still a work of enduring scholarship and insight.

Wolfson, Elliot. *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994. An outstanding reading of medieval kabbalah by the most important American scholar of the subject. Not an easy read.

Yerushalmi, Yosef Hayim. *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*. New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1971. An elegant and rich intellectual biography of a 17th-century *converso* physician and apologist for Judaism.

Yuval, Yisrael. *"Two Nations in Your Womb": Perception of Jews and Christians*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, forthcoming in English. A provocative and highly original reading of the history

of Jewish-Christian relations. Its Hebrew version has already evoked much commentary and criticism.

Internet Resources:

http://www.library.upenn.edu/cajs/. This is the address of the library of the Center for Advanced Judaic Studies of the University of Pennsylvania, containing links to numerous sites and resources pertaining to Jewish history.

http://www.hum.huji.ac.il/dinur/. This is the address of the Jewish historical research center of the Ben Zion Dinur Institute at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. It too offers many resources and links to other sites of interest to students of this course.

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4652-01

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