

# Syllabus - Teaching Program for the Course **Rabbinic Culture in the Talmudic Period**

**Shana Strauch Schick | Talmud**

תרבות רבנית בתקופת התלמוד | 09-964-01

<b>Course Type:</b>	הרצאה (אגלית) Class
<b>Scope of credits:</b>	2 נ"ז (1 ש"ש)
<b>Year of study:</b>	תשפ"ה
<b>Semester:</b>	ב'
<b>Day &amp; Time:</b>	Wednesday 20:00
<b>Reception Time:</b>	—
<b>Lecturer Email:</b>	Straucs1@biu.ac.il
<b>Moodle Site:</b>	<a href="https://lemida.biu.ac.il">https://lemida.biu.ac.il</a>



## Course description and learning goals

### Course Abstract

This course explores the world of the Talmudic Sages and the social, literary, and cultural contexts in which they were active. The mainly peaceful Jewish experience under Persia will be contrasted with the more complex situation in Israel under Rome, highlighting ways that rabbinic texts both reflect the larger cultures from which they stem while remaining highly distinct from them.

Each unit will begin with a critical analysis of Talmudic texts, often including a comparison between Bavli and Yerushalmi parallels, in order to uncover the unique elements in each. This will be followed by an examination of contemporaneous Roman and Middle Persian texts as points of comparison, considering if and how they shed light on the rabbinic texts in question. We will explore narrative texts (Aggadah), law (halakhah), theology, covering a range of topics.

Primary texts will be provided.

### Learning objectives

1. Students will gain skills in reading and analyzing rabbinic texts through contemporary methodologies.
2. Students will be exposed to a variety of Greco-Roman and Middle Persian texts and how to evaluate them in light of rabbinic parallels.
3. Students will be exposed to scholarly discussions surrounding comparative approaches, seeing both the benefits and pitfalls.
4. Students will engage the dynamics of how talmudic law develops and the role of external factors.
5. Students will consider the world in which the Talmudic rabbis were active and how they related to it



### Active learning – lessons plan:

Lesson No.	Topic	Active learning	Required reading	Assessment
1	Introduction: Methodology and History of Scholarship		Secunda (2013), introduction, Brody; Satlow	

2	History of the Jews in Babylonia: "At Ease" in Babylonia	Collaborative learning	Jer. 29:1-7; Ezra 1; b.Menahot 110a Cohen, introduction; Gafni pp. 222-265; Kraemer chapter 7	
3	Accommodators versus Resisters: The case of R' Nahman and R' Yehuda	Collaborative learning	b.Kiddushin 70a-b; Elman 2007	
4	Preferring Babylonia over Eretz Yisrael: Persian Elements in Bavli Aggadah	Collaborative learning	B.Bava Qama 117a-b, Y.Berakhot 2:8; Sperber	
5	Tort Law in Eretz Yisrael and Bavli	Collaborative learning	Y.Bava Qamma 2:6, 3:1; b.Bava Qamma 27a-b; Strauch Schick, chapter 1	
7	Tort law in Greco-Roman and Zoroastrian Law	Collaborative learning	Hērbedestān 9; Vidēvdād ; Sperber	
8	The laws of menstrual impurity in the Bavli versus Yerushalmi	Collaborative learning	b.Nidah 61a; b.Berakhot 31a; y/Berakhot 5:4	
9	Bavli Laws of Nidah in its Sasanian Context		Šāyist nē Šāyist 3.14, 3.16; The History of al-Tabarī 5:135.) Secunda	

10	Differing Attitudes to the Sense of Smell: Eretz Yisrael and Greco Roman Texts		b.Nidah 20a; Isaiah 11:3, Targum ad loc.; Aristotle, On the Soul II.9, trans. W. S. Hett, 118–19; Wolkenfeld	
11	The Sense of Smell in Bavli and Zoroastrian texts		b.Sanhedrin 93b; Dēnkard V 24:20–20a	
12	Theodicy in the Mishnah: “Measure for Measure”	Collaborative learning	m.Kidd. 1:10, m.Peah 1:1; mShabbat 2:6	
13	The Problem of Theodicy: A Babylonian Concern	Collaborative learning	b.Shabbat 55a-b, b.Qiddushin. 39b b.Menahot 29b	
14	The Zoroastrian Solution to Theodicy		Pahlavi Vidēvdād 5.9; Elman, “(1990); Elman (1991)	

(In a course that lasts a whole year, the additional sessions should be added)

\* There may be changes in the syllabus depending on learning progress and effectiveness



### Final Grade:

#### Components of the score:

**Assignments for class preparation – 30%**

**Exam - 70%** - Knowledge objectives - a written theoretical test with comprehension questions to test mastery of the material.

For PhD students, you may pick a topic that we have not studied that you would like to explore and engage in the same kind of textual analysis and discussion we have done in class.

\* **Attendance** – No weight should be given in the final grade to the mere attendance at the class.



### Course Requirements:

- **Regular Assignments** – assigned to the students as part of preparation for classes, such as: material to prepare with accompanying questions, written responses to articles, presentations. These regular assignments are a way to ensure that students do the preparation and can participate in class discussions. These assignments constitutes 30% of your final grade. They are either submitted through the class moodle and graded by me or presented orally in class.
- **Attendance** –80% attendance is required. Students are expected to make up the work for any missed classes.



### Prerequisites:

None. This class is intended for all interested students.

Course number	Course name
	Rabbinic Culture in the Talmudic Period



### Bibliography:

#### Required content for reference –

1. Robert Brody, “Irano-Talmudica: The New Parallelomania?,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 106 (2016): 209–32
2. Barak Cohen, *For Out of Babylonia Shall Come Torah and the Word of the Lord from Nehar Peqod*, (Brill: Leiden, 2017)

3. Yaakov Elman, "The Suffering of the Righteous in Babylonian and Palestinian Sources," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 80(3-4) (January-April 1990), pp. 315-339
4. Yaakov Elman, "Righteousness as Its Own Reward: An Inquiry into the Theologies of the Stam," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 57 (1991), pp. 35-67
5. Yaakov Elman, "Middle Persian Culture and Babylonian Sages: Accommodation and Resistance in the Shaping of Rabbinic Legal Tradition," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature* (ed. Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Martin S. Jaffee; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 165–97.
6. Isaiah Gafni, "Babylonian Rabbinic Culture." In *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*. Ed. By Biale, David. New York: Schocken Books, 2002
7. Geoffrey Herman, "'One day David went out for the hunt of the falconers': Persian Themes in the Babylonian Talmud," in *Shoshannat Yaakov: Jewish and Iranian Studies in Honor of Yaakov Elman*, ed. Shai Secunda and Steven Fine (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 123–30
8. David Kraemer, *A history of the Talmud*, 2019,
9. Michael Satlow, "Beyond Influence: Toward a New Historiographic Paradigm," in *Jewish Literatures and Cultures: Context and Intertext*, ed. Anita Norich and Yaron Zvi Eliav, *Brown Judaic Studies* ; No. 349 (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2008), 37–53
10. Shai Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud: Reading the Bavli in Its Sasanian Context* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013)
11. Shai Secunda, *The Talmud's Red Fence: Menstrual Impurity And Difference In Babylonian Judaism And Its Sasanian Context*, 1st ed. (Oxford University Press, 2020),
12. Daniel Sperber, "On the Unfortunate Adventures of Rav Kahana: A Passage of Saboraic Polemic from Sasanian Persia," in Shaul Shaked, ed., *Irano Judaica*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi, 1982), 83-100
13. Daniel Sperber, *The City in Roman Palestine* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998
14. Shana Strauch Schick, *Intention in Talmudic Law*, (Leiden: Brill, 2021)
15. Meira Wolkenfeld, "Cultural Attitudes Toward Scent in the Interpretation of Isaiah 11:3," in *Land and Spirituality in Rabbinic Literature: A Memorial Volume for Yaakov Elman*, ed. Shana Strauch Schick. (Leiden: Brill, 2022), pp. 239-259

### **Textbooks and other content -**

1. Hermann Strack and Gunter Stemberger, Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).
2. חנוך אלבק, מבוא לתלמודים, (תל אביב: דביר, תשכט)
3. Yitzhak Frank, The Practical Talmud Dictionary (Ariel Institute: Jerusalem, repr. 1994)
4. D. N. Mackenzie, A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary (London: Oxford University Press, 1986).