

סילבוס - תוכנית הוראה לקורס

The Babylonian Talmud - Composition, Context, and Interpretation

The Dept. of Talmud and Oral Law | Dr. Shana Strauch-Schick

The Babylonian Talmud - Composition, Context, and Interpretation | 09-966-01

הרצאה (באנגלית)	סוג הקורס:
2	היקף נ"ז:
תשפ"ו	שנת לימודים:
ב'	סמסטר:
רביעי, 18:30 (בזום)	יום ושעה:
בתאום	שעת קבלה:
shanaschick@gmail.com	מייל מרצה:
https://lemida.biu.ac.il	קישור לאתר למדה:



תיאור הקורס ומטרות למידה

Course Description:

This course examines the major rabbinic texts produced in late antique Roman Palestine and Sasanian Babylonia, tracing the development of rabbinic literature and the scholarly methods used to study it. Beginning with the Mishnah, Tosefta, and Midrash Halakhah, and continuing through the Jerusalem Talmud and classical midrashic collections, students will explore the literary forms, legal reasoning, and theological concepts that shaped the early rabbinic canon. The course then turns to the Babylonian Talmud (Bavli), examining its distinctive literary and conceptual features, its complex relationship to Palestinian traditions, and the interpretive strategies required to engage this foundational work of rabbinic literature.

To engage the full range of rabbinic texts, the course will focus on the sources included in the Passover Haggadah—one of the most well-known and widely used texts in Jewish tradition. These sources provide a powerful test case for how the rabbis reimagined and reconstituted Judaism after the destruction of the Second Temple, while offering students a cohesive entry point into the broader rabbinic corpus.

Throughout the course, students will also be introduced to key scholarly approaches to rabbinic literature, including redaction criticism, source analysis, literary methods, and historical contextualization. By engaging both primary texts (with translations) and modern scholarship, students will gain tools for understanding how rabbinic texts were formed, transmitted, and interpreted across regions and generations.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Identify and describe the major rabbinic texts from the Land of Israel and Babylonia, including the Mishnah, Tosefta, halakhic and aggadic midrashim, the Jerusalem Talmud, and the Babylonian Talmud.
2. Explain the historical and cultural contexts in which these texts were composed and transmitted, particularly in relation to the destruction of the Second Temple and the transformation of Jewish life in late antiquity.
3. Apply key scholarly methods—such as redaction criticism, source analysis, literary analysis, and historical contextualization—to the study of rabbinic texts.
4. Compare and contrast the literary styles, theological concerns, and legal reasoning found in Palestinian and Babylonian rabbinic texts.
5. Evaluate modern academic arguments about the formation, function, and meaning of rabbinic literature using primary and secondary sources.
6. Develop close reading and interpretive skills appropriate to the study of complex rabbinic texts
7. Develop skills in close reading and critical engagement with secondary literature.



למידה פעילה - תכנון מהלך השיעורים

Lesson No.	Topic	Active Learning	Required Reading	Assessment
1	Introduction: What is the Bavli?		Cohen, introduction; m.Pesahim 10:3	
2	Relationship to the Yerushalmi	Collaborative learning	Y. Pesahim 37c-d; b.Pes. 114a-b Gray, introduction	
3	Orality of the Bavli, terminology	Collaborative learning	b.Pes. 114a-b Elman	
4	Reliability of attributions	Collaborative learning	b.Pes. 114a-b; Kraemer, 175-90, Cohen	
5	The Bavli's redactors: dating		b.Pes. 114a-b; Friedman, 301-8; Halivni, 76-92; Brody 482-499	
6	Role of the Stam: sugyot	Collaborative learning	b.Pes. 114a-b	
7	Role of Stam: Conceptualization	Collaborative learning	b.Pes. 114a-b' Moscovitz	
8	The Babylonian Yeshivot		Goodblatt, Gafni	
9	Literary conventions of the Bavli: anecdotes	Collaborative learning	b.Pesahim 116; Cohen	
10	Women in Bavli law	Collaborative learning	b.Pes. 108, Kulp pp. 174-175	
11	The Iranian context	Collaborative learning	b.Pes. 109a– 112b	
12	Aggadot (narratives) in the Bavli		Rubenstein, 1-33	
13	Aggadot in the Bavli		ibid	
14	Summary, Review			

*ייתכנו שינויים בסילבוס בהתאם לקצב ההתקדמות ואפקטיביות הלמידה



ציון סופי

מסקל בציון הסופי	תיאור התוצר
50% מהציון הסופי	Assignments for Class Preparation
50% מהציון הסופי	Final Exam



דרישות הקורס

Regular Assignments – assigned to the students as part of preparation for classes, such as: material to prepare with accompanying questions to answer, 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 50% of your final grade. They are submitted through the class moodle and graded by me.

Attendance –80% attendance is required. Students are expected to make up the work for any missed classes.



דרישות קדם

None



ביבליוגרפיה: תכנים לקריאה, צפיה והאזנה (רצוי עדכני)

Required content for reference –

- Haggadah with English translation preferably Joshua Kulp and David Golinkin, The Schechter Haggadah: Art, History and Commentary (Jerusalem: Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies, 2009).
- Robert Brody, "The Anonymous Talmud and the Words of the Amoraim," Igud: Selected Essays in Jewish Studies I (2005): 213–32.
- Barak S. Cohen, For Out of Babylonia Shall Come Torah and the Word of the Lord from Nehar Peqod: The Quest for Babylonian Tannaitic Traditions (Leiden: Brill, 2017).
- Barak Cohen, "The Use of Literary Considerations as a Key for Assessing the Reliability of Memrot in the Babylonian Talmud: The Case of the Lo Shanu Ela Traditions," in Land and Spirituality in Rabbinic Literature: A Memorial Volume for Yaakov Elman ז"ל, ed. Shana Strauch Schick (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 208–38.
- Yaakov Elman, "Orality and the Redaction of the Babylonian Talmud", Oral Tradition 19, pp. 52-99.

- Elman. Order, Sequence, and Selection: The Mishnah's Anthological Choices
- Shamma Friedman, "Talmudic Studies, Investigating the Sugya, Variant Readings, and Aggada," in Meḥkarim u-Mekorot, ed. Haim Zalman Dimitrovsky (NY: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1977), pp. 301–8.
- Avraham Goldberg, "The Palestinian Talmud," The Literature of the Sages First Part: Oral Tora, Halakha, Mishna, Tosefta, Talmud, External Tractates, ed. Shmuel Safrai. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987. Pp. 303-322
- Alyssa M. Gray, A Talmud in Exile: The Influence of Yerushalmi Avodah Zarah on the Formation of Bavli , Brown University Press: 2020.
- Judith Hauptman, "Does the Tosefta Precede with Mishnah: Halakhah, Aggada, and Narrative Coherence," Judaism 50, no. 2 (Spring 2001): 224– 40;
- Judith Hauptman, "How Old Is the Haggadah?," Judaism 51, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 5–18.
- Tal Ilan, "'Daughters of Israel, Weep for Rabbi Ishmael': The Schools of Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Ishmael on Women," Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues 4 (2001): 15–34.
- Menahem Kahana, "The Halakhic Midrashim", Literature of the Sages II, pp. 30-40
- David Kraemer, "On the Reliability of Attributions in the Babylonian Talmud," pp. 175–90.
- Leib Moscovitz, Talmudic Reasoning: From Casuistics to Conceptualization (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002).
- W. David Nelson, The Reconstruction of the "Mekhilta of Rabbi Shimon b. Yoḥai": A Reexamination, Hebrew Union College Annual, Vol. 70/71, One Hundred Twenty-Fifth Anniversary (1999-2000), pp. 261-302
- Ishay Rosen-Zvi, The Mishnaic Sotah Ritual: Temple, Gender and Midrash, trans. Orr Scharf, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism v. 160. Lat (Leiden: Brill, 2012).
- Jeffrey Rubenstein, Talmudic Stories: Narrative Art, Composition, and Culture (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), pp. 1-33.
- Joshua Schwartz, "Lessons from Inter-Communal Conflict During the Second Temple Period," Jewish Political Studies Review 12 (Fall 2000), pp. 39-52.
- Haim Shapira, "The Schools of Hillel and Shammai." Jewish Law Annual 17 (2007), pp. 159-208.
- Heinemann, Joseph. 'Profile of a Midrash: The Art of Composition in Lev Rab" JAAR 39 (1971) 141-50;
- Siegfried Stein, "The Influence of Symposia Literature on the Literary Form of the Pesah Haggadah," Journal of Jewish Studies 8 (1957)
- David Stern Anthology and Polysemy in Classical Midrash, The Anthology in Jewish Literature ed. David Stern pp. 108-139
- Joseph Tabory, JPS Commentary on the Haggadah: Historical Introduction, Translation, and Commentary (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2008)

- David Weiss Halivni, *Midrash, Mishnah, and Gemara: The Jewish Predilection for Justified Law* (Harvard University Press, 1986).

Recommended content – enrichment reading.

- Albeck Mevo LeMishnah chaps. 4, 6
- Carol Bakhos, “Orality and Writing.” *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine*, pp. 482-499.
- M. Bar-Asher, “Mishnaic Hebrew: An Introductory Survey” *Literature of the Sages*
- Yitzhak Frank, *The Practical Talmud Dictionary* (Ariel Institute: Jerusalem, repr. 1994)
- Shamma Friedman, *Tosefta Atikta Pesah Rishon: Synoptic Parallels of Mishna and Tosefta Analyzed With Introduction* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2002)
- Lawrence Schiffman, *Understanding Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism* (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 2003), pp. 3-29, 39-62, 197-213.
- Saul Lieberman, *Talmuda Shel Kesarin*; Lieberman, *Sifrei Zuta B: Talmuda Shel Kesarin*, (NY: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1968), pp. 125–36 (Hebrew)
- Jacob Neusner, “The Formation of Rabbinic Judaism: Yavneh from AD 70-100”, *ANRW* II 3-42, pp. 3-42
- Vanessa Ochs, *The Passover Haggadah: A Biography*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020)
- Yaakov Sussman, *Talmud Yerushalmi: According to MS. Or. 4720 (Scal. 3) of the Leiden University Library with Restorations and Corrections*. (The Academy of the Hebrew Language: Jerusalem, 2001), pages ru-ʾ (Hebrew)
- Yaakov Sussman. “Ve-shuv Li-yerushalmi Neziqin.” In *Talmudic Studies*, edited by Yaakov Sussman and David Rosenthal (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1990), pp. 55–133. (Hebrew)