

Jewish Folk Literature

Professor Haya Bar-Itzhak

Course Description

Jewish folk literature has a long historical record. Among the Jews written sources played a great role in creation and transmission of folklore. The tendency developed among the Jews in early times was to put down in writing folk literature as well as folk customs and beliefs. We can trace folk literary forms in Biblical and Rabbinic literature and Jewish literature in the Middle Ages.

Because of the dispersion of the Jews among many peoples and in different countries, Jewish folklore in general and folk literature in particular is comprised of many common elements, but also separate local developments, which include features related to the local non-Jewish folklore.

Such a historical depth and cultural diversity add to the richness and complexity of Jewish folk literature.

The course is an introduction to this literary folk tradition. We will concentrate on folk literature in ancient Jewish sources as well as modern Jewish folk literature of various Jewish ethnic groups. We will explore trends of continuity and change in Jewish folk literature and discuss ethnographic, poetic and thematic aspects such as the recording of folk literature in the natural environment while examining the storytelling event and performance; Poetic aspects such as character, space, time, genre; main themes in Jewish folk literature; and research approaches to folk literature.

Course Requirements

There is no prerequisite for the course. The classes will consist of lectures and discussions, and the weekly reading assignments. During the course the students will write two minor papers (40%). At the end of the semester students shall take a final examination (60%).

Absences will negatively impact your grade. You should not miss this class unless you have an emergency or a disease.

Bibliography

Books:

Bar-Itzhak, Haya and Aliza Shenhar, 1993, *Jewish Moroccan Folk Narratives from Israel*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Bar-Itzhak, Haya, 2001, *Jewish Poland – Legends of Origin, Ethnopoetics and Legendary Chronicles*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Bar-Itzhak, Haya, 2005, *Israeli Folk Narratives: Settlement, Immigration, Ethnicity*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Bar-Itzhak, Haya, 2010, *Pioneers of Jewish Ethnography and Folkloristics in Eastern Europe*, Ljubljana: ZRC Publishing in association with the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology at ZRC SAZU.

- Ben-Amos, Dan and Jerome R. Mintz, trans. and eds. , 1970, *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov* [Shivhei Ha-Besht] The Earliest Collection of Legends about the Founder of Hasidism
Bloomington: Indiana University Press; other editions 1984, 1993.
- Ben-Amos, Dan, 2007, 2011, *Folktales of the Jews*, Vol. 2 & Vol. 3, Philadelphia: The Jewish
Publication Society.
- Bin Gorion [Berdyzewski], Micha Joseph, 1990, *Mimekor Yisrael: Classical Jewish Folktales*,
Abridged and Annotated Edition, Emanuel bin Gorion, ed. I. M. Lask, trans. Prepared by
Dan Ben-Amos Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Dundes, Alan, 1991, *The Blood Libel Legend - a Casebook in Anti-Semitic Folklore*, Madison:
University of Wisconsin Press.
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Ktav, 1968.
- Gaster, Moses, ed. and trans., 1934, *Ma'aseh Book*, Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society
of America.
- Ginzberg, Louis. *The Legends of the Jews*. 7 vols. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society
of America, 1909-1939.
- Jason, Heda, 1977, *Ethnopoetry: Form, Content, Function*, Bonn: Linguistica Biblica.
- Noy, Dov, 1963, *Folktales of Israel*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Oring, Elliott, 1982, *Israeli Humor: The Content and Structure of the Chizbat of the Palmah*,
Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Propp, Vladimir, 1968, 1970, *Morphology of the Folktale*, Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Sabar, Yona, ed., 1982, *The Folk Literature of the Kurdistan Jews: An Anthology*, New Haven:
Yale University Press.
- Schwarzbaum, Haim, 1968, *Studies in Jewish and World Folklore*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Sherman, Josepha, 1992, *A Sampler of Jewish American Folklore*, Little Rock: August House.
- Weinreich, Beatrice, ed., 1988, *Yiddish Folktales*, New York: Pantheon and Yivo.
- Yassif, Eli, 1986, *An Annotated Bibliography of Jewish Folklore*, New York: Garland.
- Yassif, Eli, 1999, *The Hebrew Folktale: History, Genre, Meaning*, Bloomington: Indiana:
Indiana University Press.

Articles:

- Alexander, Tamar, 1987, "A Legend of the Blood Libel in Jerusalem: A Study of a Process of folk Tale Adaptation," *International Folklore Review* 5:60-74.
- Bar-Itzhak, Haya, 1993, "Narration and the Components of Communication in the Jewish Folk Legend", *Fabula*, 35, 261-281.
- Ben-Amos, Dan, 1973, "The Myth of Jewish Humor", *Western Folklore* 32:112-131.
- Ben-Amos, Dan, 1971, "Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context," *Journal of American Folklore* 84: 3-15.
- Ben-Amos, Dan, 1991t, "Jewish Folklore Studies," *Modern Judaism* 11:17-66.
- Hasan-Rokem, Galit, 1992, "Proverbs as Inter-Ethnic Dialogue in Israel", *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review*, 14, 1/2, 52-55.
- Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara, 1974, "The Fable in Context – A Social Interactional Analysis of Story-Telling Performance," In Dan Ben-Amos and Kenneth Goldstein (eds.), *Folklore: Performance and Communication*, The Hague: Mouton, 106-130.
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara, 1978, "Culture Shock and Narrative Creativity", in Dorson R.M. (ed.), *Folklore in the Modern World*, The Hague: Mouton, 109-121.
- Orlik, Axel, 1965, "Epic Laws" in *The Study of Folklore* ed. Alan Dundes, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice Hall.
- Patai, Raphael, 1983, "Problems and Tasks of Jewish Folklore and Ethnology" and "Jewish Folklore and Jewish Tradition," in *On Jewish Folklore* Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 17-44.
- Shenhar, Aliza, 1987, "The Woman with the Animal Face" in her *Jewish and Israeli Folklore*, New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 6-29.
- Shenhar, Aliza, 1987, "The Predestined Marriage", in her *Jewish and Israeli Folklore*, New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 30-46.
- Shenhar, Aliza, 1988, "Israeli Folklore under Conditions of Stress," *International Folklore Review* 6:16-20.
- Shenhar, Aliza, 1991, "The Disappearance of the Submarine Dakar - Folklore, Community and Stress," *Fabula* 32:204-215.
- Shenhar, Aliza, 1989, "Legendary Rumors as Social Control in the Israeli Kibbutz," *Fabula* 30:63-82.

Zerubavel, Yael, 1991, "The Politic of Interpretation: Tel Hai in Israeli Collective Memory", *AJS Review*, 16, 133-160.

Schedule of Classes

- We 9/3 Folk Literature – Definition & Description
- Mo 9/8 Epic Laws
Reading: Olrik 1965
- We 9/10 Characteristics of Jewish Folk Literature
Reading: Yassif 1999, VII—XVII; 1-7
- Mo 9/15 Jewish Myth
We 9/17 Reading: Yassif 1999, 8-15
- Mo 9/22 Jewish Legends – Historical & Sacred
We 9/24 Reading: Yassif 1999, 15-26
- Mo 9/29 Jewish Legends of Origin
We 10/1 Reading: Bar-Itzhak 2001
- Mo 10/6 Demons Legends
We 10/8 Reading: Yassif 1999, 144-165, 351-370
- Mo 10/20 Jewish Fairy Tale
We 10/22 Reading: Bar-Itzhak 2005, 97-151; Shenhar 1987, 6-29
- Mo 10/27 The Jewish Novella
We 10/29 Reading: Yassif 1999, 343-350
- Mo 11/3 The Collection & Study of Jewish Folklore
Mo 11/10 Reading: Ben-Amos 1991; Bar-Itzhak 2010, 11-26.
- Mo 11/17 Topics in Jewish Folklore – Diaspora and The land of Israel
Reading: Noy 1963, 4-9; Bin-Gurion 1999, 272-294
- We 11/19 Topics in Jewish Folklore – Blood Libel Legends
Reading: Dundes 1991; Alexander 1987
- Mo 11/24 Topics in Jewish Folklore – Charity
We 11/26 Reading: Bin-Gurion 1990, 414-422
- Mo 12/1 Topics in Jewish Folklore – Elijah
Reading: Bin-Gurion 1990, 427-440

We 12/3 Jewish Folk Narratives in Israel
Mo 12/8 Reading: Bar-Itzhak & Shenhar 1993; Noy 1963; Ben-Amos 2007, 2011;
Shenhar 1988; Shenhar 1991; Bar-Itzhak 2005, 29-50

Changes in Syllabus

This syllabus is subject to change.