Topics in Middle Eastern History 144
Anthropology, the Bible and the Israelites

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Course Goal: To explore various topics in the Hebrew Bible through the interpretive lens of Cultural Anthropology in order to develop an ethnographic description of the ancient Israelites.

Course Format: We treat two topics per session. The class will be divided into teams A and B. After some general orientation sessions, for each special topic the class will divide between “Israelites” and “Anthropologists,” exchanging roles after each topic. Each group will be responsible for different background readings, whether of anthropological theory, case studies from the field, anthropological analyses of the Bible, or the Bible itself. In a crude simulation of the ethnographic encounter, during class the two groups will ask each other questions informed by their readings. (Don’t forget: “subjects” are entitled to interrogate anthropologists!) In this way, we can begin to understand the biblical worldview from both the subjective/emic and objective/etic perspectives.

Often, readings will be duplicated, both because you’ll be switching roles, and because we will interrogate the text from different perspectives. The biblical readings may seem unduly lengthy, but remember: you’re skimming for specific information. This you should sort into various categories in your notes, and come armed to class with the most pertinent passages. (“Winging it” will simply waste class time!) The Israelites will often divide up the biblical assignments to lighten the load and to replicate the fieldwork experience by yielding multiple, incomplete, contradictory perspectives; usually the Anthropologists will do the same. It is imperative that each student come to class fully prepared, having considered possible questions/answers beforehand. I highly recommend that you form two on-line, virtual villages to coordinate roles, divide readings, and prepare questions and answers prior to the class.

Course Requirements: class participation (10%), one 3-page (900-word) essay (20%, due class 6), one 15-page (4500-word) research paper
(50%, due Monday of exams week), one final examination (20%). FOR BOTH ESSAYS, YOU MUST SUBMIT A MARKED-UP PENULTIMATE DRAFT ALONG WITH THE FINAL DRAFT.

Books:
1. Joy Hendry, Other People’s Worlds (OPW) (NYU, 1999) REQUIRED

2. Any academically reputable edition of the Bible—e.g., The Jewish Study Bible, ed. A. Berlin and M. Z. Brettler, or The New Oxford Annotated Bible (ed. M. D. Coogan). Check out the informative essays and indices in the back. If you already own a Bible, let me check it—please do not use the New International Version, which is more an apologetic paraphrase than a translation. If you don’t mind the advertising and preaching, there is also much to be said for using a searchable, online Bible for your research—e.g., https://www.biblegateway.com/. RECOMMENDED

(E-) reserves: Accessible at http://libraries.ucsd.edu/resources/course-reserves/

N.B. IN THE SYLLABUS BELOW, AFTER THE SESSION’S TITLE YOU WILL FIND THE READINGS TO BE DONE BEFOREHAND (except for class 1, obviously).

1. WELCOME/BASIC FACTS 4/4
   Introductions
   Requirements
   Terms: Bible, exegesis, canon, Tanakh (Torah-Nevi’im-Ketuvim), Old Testament, Hebrew Bible, Torah, Pentateuch, Scripture; A.D./B.C./C.E./B.C.E.; Canaan, Israel, Judah, Palestine; Jew; Israelite; Israeli; Hebrew; God/Elohim/LORD/Yahweh
   Chronological/Geographic parameters

   R. Levitt Kohn and R. Moore, A Portable God (Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), xi-42 (available as e-reserve)

2. HOW (NOT) TO WRITE FOR MY CLASSES 4/6
Essay Guide (distributed in class or by email)

3. **Culture: A General Introduction 4/11**

   *OPW Introduction and Chapters 1, 5*

   D. E. Brown, *Human Universals* (Temple University Press, 1991), chap. 6 (available as e-reserve) (you may also wish to skim a list extracted from Brown, on-line at http://condor.depaul.edu/mfiddler/hyphen/humunivers.htm).

   Discussion: Based on the readings and your general knowledge, what are the methods and aims of Cultural Anthropology? Is subjectivity a barrier? Are there/have there been ethical problems? Is there any relationship to biology? Why bother?

4. **Realia: Bible and Archaeology 4/13**

   **A. OPW Chapter 12**

   **B. Y. Aharoni, The Land of the Bible (John Knox, 1979), 3-42; O. Borowski, Agriculture in Iron Age Israel (Eisenbrauns, 1987), 3-44**

   **First Essay Assignment:** Can we “do” anthropology of the Hebrew Bible? I.e., can the Old Testament serve as a source of ethnographic information analogous to actual fieldwork? What are the possible problems and limitations? **Submit a 3-page paper (due class 6; optional rewrite due 1 week after paper is returned).**

5. **Family, Kinship and Ethnicity 4/18**

   **B1. OPW Chapter 11**


A3. Leviticus ch 18; 19:17-20; 20:10-21; ch 21; 24:10-14; 25:23-55; Numbers 20:14-21; 36:1-12; ch 26; Deuteronomy 21:15-21; 23:1-9; 24:1-4; 25:5-10; Joshua chh 7; 13-19; Judges 9:1-3; 11:1-3; 12:1-7; chh 19-21; 1 Samuel 1:1-8; 13:19-22; 2 Samuel chh 2; 3; chh 12-14; Ezekiel ch 18; Ruth; Ezra ch 2; 8:1-12; chh 9; 10; Neh 13:23-31; 1Chronicles chh 1-9 (just skim the genealogies, but know the basic tribal structure)


6. GENDER 4/20


A2. S. Nanda, R. Warms, “Chapter 10: Gender,” Cultural Anthropology


B1. Genesis chh 1-3; 12-34; 38-39; Exodus chh 1; 2; 13:11-15; 34:11-16; Leviticus chh 4; 12; 15; 18; Numbers 5:11-6:8; ch 25; 27:1-11; chh 30; 31; Deuteronomy 5:16,18; 22:5,13-29; Judges

B3. 1 Kings chh 1; 2; 11; Isaiah 3:16-26; Ezekiel chh 16; 23; Hosea chh 1-3; Amos 4:1-13; Psalms ch 45; Proverbs chh 5-8; 31:10-31; Song of Songs; Ruth; Ecclesiastes 7:26; Esther


7. THE DEAD AND MOURNING 4/25


B2. OPW Part of Chapter 4 (pp. 76-77); L. M. Danforth, “Metaphors of Mediation in Greek Funeral Laments,” Death, Mourning, and Burial (ed. A. C. G. M. Robben; Blackwell, 2004), 156-66


8. GOD, THE GODS AND MAN 4/27

A1. OPW Chapters 7-8


B2. Isaiah ch 6; 14:7-20; 40:12-28; 41:4-7; ch 44; 46:5-7; Jeremiah 2:5-28; 10:2-16; 11:9-13; 51:15-19; Ezekiel chh 1; 8; Hosea 2:4-15; Habakkuk 2:14-20; Psalms chh 8; 29; 82; 89:6-15; chh 96; 97; 103; 104; 115; 135; 144:3-4; Proverbs ch 8; Job chh 1-2; 4:17-19; 38:4-7; Nehemiah 9:6

9. TABOO 5/2

B1. OPW Chapter 2


10. MAGIC: DEMONISM-DIVINATION-SORCERY-MEDICINE-OATHS-Curses 5/4

A1. OPW Chapters 7-8


B2. 1 Kings ch 17-2 Kings 8:15; 13:14-19; Isaiah 8:19-20; 65:4-5; Jeremiah ch 28; 34:17-22; Ezekiel 21:26-27; Zechariah 10:2; Job chh 1-2; 2 Chronicles 16:12


11. **RITES OF PASSAGE 5/9**

B1. *OPW Chapter 4*


A2. Genesis chh 17; 22; 34: Exod 4:21-26; chh 12; 13; 29; Leviticus chh 12; 14; Joshua chh 3-5; Judges 11:32-40
12. SACRIFICE 5/11

   A2. *OPW* Chapter 3


13. SPIRIT POSSESSION-ALTERED STATES 5/16
   B1. R. R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Fortress, 1980), 21-88


   A1. Leviticus 19:31; 20:6; Numbers chh 11-12; Deuteronomy 13:1-6; 18:9-22; 1 Samuel chh 3; 9; 10; 19:18-24; ch 28; 2 Samuel ch 12; 1 Kings chh 13; 14;17-22; 2 Kings chh 1-10

   A2. Isaiah chh 6-8; Jeremiah ch 1; 11:18-12:6; 15:10-21; 17:14-18; chh 18-28; 36-37; Ezekiel chh 1-12; Hosea chh 1-3; Joel 3:1-2; Amos chh 7-9; Zechariah chh 1-6
14. **Political Organization 5/18**


A2. R. C. McCoy, *Alterations of State – Sacred Kingship in the English Reformation* (Columbia University, 2002), 87-121

A3. OPW Chapters 4, 10


15. **Conflict Resolution 5/23**

B1. OPW Chapter 9


16. WARFARE 5/25


B1. Genesis ch 14; Exodus 15:1-18; 17:8-16; Leviticus ch 26; Numbers chh 1; 2; 10; 13; 14; 21; 22; 31; Deuteronomy 1:19-45; chh 7; 20; 21:10-14; 23:10-15; 25:17-19; 28:7,25-26; Joshua chh 1-12; Judges

B2. 1 Samuel chh 4-7; 11; 13-15; 17; 21:2-7; chh 23; 28-31; 2 Samuel chh 2-5; 8; 10; 11; 15-20; 23:8-39


B4. 2 Kings; Isaiah chh 10; 31; 63:1-6; Joel ch 4; Micah 4:1-5; Psalms ch 18; 46:9-12

17. COSMOLOGY AND CREATION 5/30

(I do not vouch for the accuracy of translations)


B4. OPW Chapter 7

A1. One of the following books (all on reserve at Library):
1 Slaying the Dragon, B. Batto
2. God’s Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea, J. Day
3. Yhwh’s Combat with the Sea, C. Kloos

A2. Genesis chh 1-9; 1 Samuel 2:8; 2 Samuel 22:5-20; Isaiah 11:15-16; 14:5-20 17:12-14; 26:21-27:1; 40:12-14; 42:5; 44:24; 45:12; 50:2-3; 51:6,9-11; 66:1-2; Jeremiah 4:23-28; 5:22; 31:35; 51:15-16; Ezekiel 28:11-19; 29:3-5; 32:2-10; Amos 7:4; 9:2-6; Nahum 1:3-8; Habakkuk ch 3; Malachi 3:10; Psalms chh 24; 29; 33:4-15; 44:20; 46:3-8; ch 65; 69:14-16; 74:12-17; 75:4; 82:5; chh 89; 93; 104; 144:5-7; chh 147; 148; Proverbs 8:12-31; Job 7:12; 9:2-13; chh 26; 38; 40:15-41:26

18. Mythic Temporal Loops 6/1
A. M. Eliade, The Myth of the Eternal Return (Princeton University, 2005), 1-48; Propp, Exodus 1-18, pp. 31-34

B1. One of the following books (all on reserve):
1 Slaying the Dragon, B. Batto
2. God’s Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea, J. Day
3. Yhwh’s Combat with the Sea, C. Kloos

31; Ezekiel ch 16; 20:33-40; 36:24-38; 47:1-12; Hosea 2:16-25; 13:4-6; Joel 4:18; Zechariah 10:3-12; 13:1; 14:1-9; Psalms 36:6-10; 46:2-8; chh 65; 77; 78; 81; 105; 106; 107:33-38; ch 114; Nehemiah chh 9-10


19. LITERACY 6/6
B1. J. Goody, ed. Literacy in Traditional Societies, pp. 1-26


A2. D. M. Carr, Writing on the Tablet of the Heart (Oxford, 2005), 112-73


Jeremiah 30:1-3; 32:6-15; ch 36; 45:1; Ezekiel 2:9-3:10; 37:15-28; 43:10-12; Habakkuk 2:2; Nehemiah 7:5-9:3

20. SUMMATION 6/8

FINAL EXAMINATION 6/13 8:00-11:00 A.M. (COME ON TIME – IT WILL NOT TAKE YOU MORE THAN AN HOUR!)
GUIDELINES FOR THE FINAL ESSAY

Your paper should be an original contribution, 15 pages (4500 words, excluding notes and bibliography) in length, using both primary sources (i.e., the Hebrew Bible and, if relevant, other texts or archaeological artifacts) and secondary sources (books; use the Internet for general orientation but cite only published work by serious scholars [ask me if unsure]). Document all assertions. (I have yet to read an over-annotated student paper!)

Topics may be those covered in class or others, such as:

Animal/Plant symbolism
Wet vs. Dry
Storm symbolism
Desert vs. Sown
Farming vs. Herding
Symbolism of Domestic vs. Wild Animals
The Bible’s own anthropology
Arts and crafts
Cities
Pilgrimage
Light vs. Dark
Priesthood vs. Kingship vs. Prophecy
Social Contract
Imagined ideals
Ethnicity (us vs. them)
Local etiologies
Autochthony vs. Allochthony
Love vs. (?) Marriage
The Temple/Tabernacle/High Place
Symbolism of the four directions
Shame vs. honor
Sin and impurity
Sacred Mountain/Trees/Springs
Healing
Music
Forbidden mixtures
Revering elders
Human sacrifice (?)
Relation to the land
Counting people
Proverbs and/or riddles
If you choose to investigate your own topic of interest (highly encouraged!), you must clear it with me. This is for your own good—there are many excellent questions you might ask about the Israelites for which answers are simply not available. A good source of topics is *Myth, Legend and Custom in the Old Testament* (on reserve in the Library)—but don’t rely on the data in this century-old book. Another good source of ideas (questions, not answers!) is Brown’s *Human Universals.*
SOME ADVICE

Academic biblical research presents the newcomer with many pitfalls. Things to worry about:

1. The ratio of primary to secondary sources approaches $1:∞$.

2. If you don’t have an advanced knowledge of Hebrew, how do you know what the passage you’re studying means? Are there textual errors (corruptions) or words of unknown or debated significance? A good biblical commentary can help here. Remember: at least for the Bible, a published translation will always make *more sense* than the original, because it will try to conceal obscurities. (In general, we understand classical Hebrew *prose* very well, for *poetry*, sometimes we do and sometimes we don’t.)

3. If you know modern Hebrew, do not assume that words meant the same thing in ancient Hebrew.

4. When was your secondary source published? Biblical Studies, no less than genetics, has changed over time. Don’t get caught citing yesterday's “fact.”

5. Does your source betray theological bias? This can be overt, as in fundamentalist history, or covert, as in alternative explanations left unconsidered. Beware “helpful” footnotes, especially in Orthodox Jewish publications. Cross allusions to the New Testament are also irrelevant to this course.

6. Is your source primarily concerned with what the text meant to the Israelites, what it has meant to Jews/Christians, or what it should mean today? Only the first is relevant for this course, though the second is an equally valid field of historical study.

Last and Most Important,

7. **YOU MOST LIKELY HAVE BEEN BRAINWASHED!!!** Even if you’re not religious, be aware that over 2,000 years of the most intense Jewish and Christian research, teaching and preaching have been devoted to *obscuring* the Old Testament’s original meaning by selective reading and willful misinterpretation. It still goes on every weekend! Moreover, when you were first exposed to the Bible (age 3?), your brain was extremely undeveloped. With songs, dances, hugs, snacks and stories, not to mention the threat of damnation, you were encouraged to **see things that are not there** and **not see things that are there**. Those possessing the “advantage” of no religious schooling have still absorbed
most of this indoctrination by osmosis. (A litmus test: do you think that the story of Eden tells how humanity became sinful because the Devil tempted Adam and Eve to eat an apple that gave them the consciousness of right and wrong? If you think any of this is accurate, you've been infected!)

Why is knowing this important? Because, when you read and write, your juvenile brain may attempt to take over. How will you know that this is happening? If you describe everything in the Bible as a “story”; if you begin sentences with “this teaches us”; if you find yourself writing of “sin,” “faith,” “righteousness,” “blasphemy,” “damnation”...; if you catch yourself called individuals in the Old Testament “Christians” (or “Jews” for that matter); if you find yourself making moral judgments (“But it’s wrong to lie!”); if you think this course teaches the same things as your Sunday school; if you find the Bible easy to understand. Students, irrespective of actual intelligence, differ widely in their ability to combat indoctrination. Some will get very little from this course, because their brains will be working furiously to ignore or misinterpret the implications of the material.

Lastly, BE WARNED!!! For a certain percentage of individuals, courses such as this overturn and potentially ruin their lives. Family members are estranged; marriages fall apart; jobs are lost; one is voluntarily or involuntarily cut off from one’s prior religious community. Those most at risk are absolutists, who tend to think in all-or-nothing terms. As the Greeks, another wise ancient people, advised: “Know thyself!”