

Jews in Medieval Eastern Europe



Time and Location

Mondays, Wednesday, and Thursdays, from 9:35 to 10:25

Flint 111

Description

The medieval history of Eastern Europe is poorly represented in today's scholarly work published in English. Scholarly interest in Eastern Europe focuses especially on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the period of nationalism. The medieval history of the area is given comparatively less attention, which often amounts to slightly more than total neglect. For most students in medieval studies, Eastern Europe is marginal and East European topics simply *exotica*. The same is true to an even greater degree about the medieval history of the East European Jewry. The East European Jews make up about 90 percent of all Ashkenazi ("German-rite") Jews in the world, and about the same percentage of all Jewish people in the United States have Ashkenazi ancestors.

Some have long maintained that the presence of the Ashkenazim in Eastern Europe is the result of medieval immigration, but others have recently raised the possibility of local origins of at least some of the Ashkenazi Jews of Eastern Europe. Still others point to the Slavic features of Yiddish, while many Karaites of Eastern Europe insist on the difference between them and Karaites anywhere else in the world. Neither Sephardim nor Ashkenazim had any state traditions in the Middle Ages that could be compared to those associated with the conversion of the Khazars in late 8th or early 9th century. In the 13th century, the Jews enjoyed (if only temporarily) a privileged position in Christian Hungary that had no parallel anywhere else in Europe outside al-Andalus. To many historians of medieval Jewry, the history of the Jews in Eastern Europe begins with the Ashkenazi immigrants of the 12th and subsequent century, but there is much (and very rich) Jewish history in that part of Europe long before that. Who were those peoples? What made them so difficult to represent by the traditional means of Western historiography? What historical circumstances separate the Western from the Eastern half of the European continent? What social structures and political institutions were responsible for the specific developments in the medieval history of the area? How were Jewish communities formed in that region and under what circumstances did they come into being? Above all, this course aims to answer some of these questions. Following a chronological order, we will look, each week, at the questions and problems raised by the study of the Jews in Eastern Europe, and at some of the primary sources from which historians draw their analysis.

Textbooks

All readings—primary sources, articles and chapters—are available in pdf format on Canvas (elearning.ufl.edu/). You are required to check the course page on Canvas regularly for updates.

Assignments and grading policies

There is no attendance policy, but you are responsible for attending all lectures and reading the required texts. Class participation may be taken into account to determine the overall grade. The basis for evaluation of performance will be a reading journal and five in-class assignments. Below is a detailed description of these assignments and the corresponding percentages of your final grade. Extra-credit work will be accepted only for students with active participation in class discussions. If necessary, I will explain the format of the extra-credit option during regular office hours. You are otherwise encouraged to keep in touch with me by e-mail, if you have any questions: I check my mailbox regularly, and promise to answer quickly.

Reading journal. A quick glimpse at the list of weekly topics (see below) will no doubt convince you that this is a course with serious readings. You will be expected to digest a substantial amount of information in a fairly short period of time. The best way to do this is to keep a journal. Before every class meeting, you will post an e-mail message on my address (on top of this syllabus), in which you will discuss briefly the readings for the coming meeting, ask questions and/or make comments, raise issues that need

clarification, etc. All e-mails should arrive at least 12 hours before class meetings. Be sure to keep your postings to a reasonable length (175 to 250 words long). I do not want you to spend too much time on them, but I expect you to give an articulate presentation of your thoughts. Needless to say, I also expect you to check on correct grammar and spelling before clicking on "Send." Because the journal is designed to demonstrate your efforts towards an initial understanding of the readings, I must have ***in time*** one report for each class meeting, every week. The reading journal represents seventy percent of your final grade, 1.8% for each entry (each bullet point in the list of weekly topics followed by "Read:"). I will send written feed-back (via e-mail) on weekly entries midway through the term. Reading reports *cannot* be made up; you simply *need* to have a journal entry for every class meeting. Be aware that missed reports may result in a substantially lower grade.

In-class assignments. The remaining thirty percent of your final grade will be based on five short assignments in class. All five will consist of multiple-choice, map, matching, short-essay questions, or a combination thereof. Besides material covered in class lectures, the in-class assignments will focus primarily on problems raised in the readings. A careful study of these texts is necessary for a good performance at the test. Because in-class assignments are announced, I do not intend to grant any make-ups, except for emergencies (e.g., illness), in which case I may ask for official justification.

The following scale will be used in determining your final grade.

<i>Points</i>	<i>Grade</i>
97-100	A
93-96	A-
88-92	B+
81-87	B
75-80	B-
68-74	C+
61-67	C
55-60	C-
48-54	D+
41-47	D
35-40	D-
under 30	E

Weekly Topics

Week 1 (August 23-27): Introduction. Concepts and historiography

- No medieval historiography of the Jews?

Read: Johannes Heil, "Beyond history and memory: traces of Jewish historiography in the Middle Ages," *Medieval Jewish Studies online* 1 (2007-2008), 29-71.

- The myth of the Khazars

Read: Mikhail Kizilov and Diana Mikhailova. "The Khazar khaganate and the Khazars in European nationalist ideologies and scholarship." *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 14 (2005), 31-54.

- The Ashkenazi Jewry and medieval Eastern Europe

Read: Paul Wexler, "Yiddish evidence for the Khazar component in the Ashkenazic ethnogenesis." In *The World of the Khazars. New Perspectives. Selected Papers from the Jerusalem 1999 International Khazar Colloquium Hosted by the Ben Zvi Institute*, edited by Peter B. Golden, Haggai Ben-Shammai and András Róna-Tas, Handbook of Oriental Studies, Central Asia, 17 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007), pp. 387-98.

Week 2 (August 30-September 3): Sources

- Written sources

Read: Osman Karatay, "Addressees of the Genizah Khazar letter: who wrote to whom?" In *Studia mediaevalia Europaea et orientalia. Miscellanea in honorem professoris emeriti Victor Spinei oblata*, edited by George Bilavschi and Dan Aparaschivei (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2018), pp. 155-68.

- Inscriptions

Read: [Jews in Roman] *Pannonia*

- Archaeology

Read: Asher Ovadiah, "Ancient Jewish communities in Macedonia, Thrace and Upper Epirus," *Gerión* 33 (2015), 211-227.

Week 3 (September 6-10): Late antique Jews

- Written sources

Read: Martin Goodman, "Jews and Judaism in the Mediterranean diaspora in the late-Roman period: the limitations of evidence." *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 4 (1994), no. 2, 208-224.

- Archaeology

Read: Aleksandăr Panaiotov, "The Jews in the Balkan provinces of the Roman Empire: the evidence from the territory of Bulgaria." In *Negotiating Diaspora. Jewish Strategies in the Roman Empire*, edited by John M. G. Barclay (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), pp. 38-65.

- Monday, September 6: Labor Day, no classes

Week 4 (September 13-17): Crimea

- Crimea within the Empire

Read: Jonathan Shepard, "'Mists and portals': the Black Sea's north coast." In *Byzantine Trade, 4th-12th centuries. The Archaeology of Local, Regional and International Exchange. Papers of the 38th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, St John's College, University of Oxford, March 2004*, edited by Marlia Mundell Mango (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 421-41.

- Between 500 and 800

Read: *Theophanes* [Confessor, *Chronographia*]

- Jews in medieval Crimea

Read: [letter 97 of Patriarch] *Photius*

Week 5 (September 20-24): Jewish merchants and trade in the early Middle Ages

- Monday, September 20: [In-class-assignment #1](#).
- Jewish traders in Eastern Europe

Read : *Ibn Khurdadbih* [on the Radhanites]

- The slave trade

Read: Michael Toch, "Was there a Jewish slave trade (or commercial monopoly) in the early Middle Ages?" in *Mediterranean Slavery Revisited*

(500-1800), edited by Stefan Hanss, Juliane Schiel and Claudia Schmid (Zürich: Chronos, 2014), pp. 421-444.

Week 6 (September 27-October 1): The Khazar conversion to Judaism

- The Khazars

Read: Florin Curta, *Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages (500-1300)*, Brill's Companions to European History, 19 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2019), pp. 128-144.

- Why Judaism?

Read: [King] *Joseph* [on the conversion of the Khazars to Judaism]

- The conversion

Read: J. T. Olsson, "Coup d'état, coronation or conversion: some reflections on the adoption of Judaism by the Khazar khaganate." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 23 (2013), no. 4, 495-526.

Week 7 (October 4-8): The archaeology of early medieval Judaism

- Jews in the land of the Avars?

Read: Radovan Bunardžić, "Čelarevo - necropolis and settlement of the VIIIth-IXth century." In *Khazary. Vtoroi Mezhdunarodnyi kollokvium. Tezisy*, edited by Vladimir Ia. Petrukhin and Artem M. Fedorchuk (Moscow: Institut slavianovedeniia RAN/Evreiskii Universitet v Moskve, 2002), pp. 19-21.

- Wednesday, October 6: **In-class assignment #2**
- Friday, October 8: Homecoming, no classes

Week 8 (October 11-15): Jews in early medieval Greece

- Jews in Sparta

Read: [St.] *Nikon* [chases the Jews out of Lakedaimon]

- Refugees from the Fatimid caliphate in Egypt

Read: Nicholas Oikonomides, "The Jews of Chios (1049): a group of *excusati*." *Mediterranean Historical Review* 10 (1995), no. 1-2, 218-25.

- The silk industry in 12th-century Greece

Read: David Jacoby, "Silk in western Byzantium before the fourth crusade." *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 84-85 (1991-1992), 452-500.

Week 9 (October 18-22): Jews in the Balkans in the High Middle Ages

- Jews in Byzantium

Read: Amnon Linder, "The legal status of Jews in the Byzantine Empire." In *Jews in Byzantium. Dialectics of Minority and Majority Cultures*, edited by Robert Bonfil, Oded Irshai, Guy Stroumsa and Rina Talgam (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2014), pp. 149-217.

- Jews in Bulgaria

Read: Kazimir Popkonstantinov and Rossina Kostova. "Minorities and foreigners in Bulgarian medieval towns in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries: literary and archaeological fragments." In *Segregation, Integration, Assimilation. Religious and Ethnic Groups in the Medieval Towns of Central and Eastern Europe*, edited by Derek Keene, Balázs Nagy and Katalin G. Szende (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 133-49.

- Jews in the Balkans after 1204

Read: David Jacoby, "The Jewish communities in the social fabric of Latin Greece: between segregation and interaction." In *A Companion to Latin Greece*, edited by Nickiphoros I. Tsougarakis and Peter Lock (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2015), pp. 255-287.

Week 10 (October 25-29): Jewish travelers to Eastern Europe

- Monday, October 25: **In-class assignment #3**
- Ibrahim ibn Yakub

Read: Dmitrii E. Mishin, "Ibrahim ibn-Ya'qub at-Turtushi's account of the Slavs from the middle of the tenth century." *Annual of Medieval Studies at the CEU* (1994-1995), 184-99.

- Benjamin of Tudela

Read: [the part in] *Sefer [ha-massa'ot* that covers the Balkans]

Week 11 (November 1-5): Jews in Arpadian Hungary

- Laws

Read: Katalin G. Szende, "Traders, 'court Jews', town Jews: the changing roles of Hungary's Jewish population in the light of royal policy between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries." In *Intricate Interfaith Networks in the Middle Age. Quotidian Jewish-Christian Contacts*, edited by Ephraim Shoham-Steiner, *Studies in the history of daily life (800-1600)*, 5 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), pp. 119-51.

- The economic and administrative role of the Jews

Read: Nora Berend, "Hungary: the Jews between integration and exclusion." In *The Jews of Europe in the Middle Ages (Tenth to Fifteenth Centuries). Proceedings of the International Symposium Held at Speyer, 20-25 October 2002*, edited by Christoph Cluse, *Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, 4 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), pp. 261-70.

- Life in Jewish communities

Read: [rabbinical decisions concerning] *Jews* [in medieval East Central Europe]

Week 12 (November 8-12): Jews in Rus'

- The Jews of Rus'

Read: Isaiah Gruber, "'The journeys of my soul in this land of Canaan' by Yitshak ben Sirota." In *Portraits of Medieval Eastern Europe, 900-1400*, edited by Donald Ostrowski and Christian Raffensperger (Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 166-77.

- The Jews of the Rus' literature

Read: Alexander Pereswetoff-Morath, "A shadow of good spell: on Jews and anti-Judaism in the world and work of Kirill of Turov." In *Kirill of Turov, Bishop, Preacher, and Hymnographer*, edited by Ingunn Lunde (Bergen: Department of Russian Studies, University of Bergen, 2000), pp. 33-75.

- Friday, November 12: Rus' translations from Hebrew

Read: Horace G. Lunt and Moshe Taube. "Early East Slavic translations from Hebrew?" *Russian linguistics* 12 (1988), 147-87.

Week 13 (November 15-17): Jews in Poland

- Origins of Jews in Poland

Read: Aleksander Gieysztor, "The beginnings of Jewish settlement in the Polish lands." In *The Jews in Poland*, edited by Chimen Abramsky, Maciej Jachimczyk and Antony Polonsky (Oxford/New York: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 15-21.

- Organization of Jewish communities

Read: Jerzy Wyrozumski, "Jews in medieval Poland." In *The Jews in Old Poland, 1000-1795*, edited by Antony Polonsky, Jakub Basista and Andrzej Link-Lenczowski (London: Tauris, 1993), pp. 13-22.

- Privileges

Read: [the Statute of] *Kalisz*

Week 14 (November 22-24): Jewish migration into East Central Europe

- Migrations

Read: Michael Toch, "Demography and migrations," in *The Middle Ages: the Christian World*, edited by Robert Chazan, *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 335-356

- Wednesday, November 24: Thanksgiving break – no classes
- Friday, November 26: Thanksgiving break – no classes

Week 15 (November 29- December 3): Jews in Bohemia

- Monday, November 29: **In-class assignment #4**
- The Jews of Bohemia and the First Crusade

Read: *Salomo bar Simson* [on the Jewish community of Prague]

- Organization and privileges

Read: *Cosmas* [of Prague on the Jews of Prague]

Week 16 (December 6-8): Medieval Jewish culture

- Manuscripts and written culture

Read: Jiřina Sedinová, "Life and language in Bohemia as reflected in the works of the Prague Jewish school in the 12th and 13th centuries." In *Ibrahim ibn Ya'kub at-Turtushi: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism Meet in East-Central Europe, c. 800-1300 A.D. Proceedings of the International Colloquy, 25-29 April 1994*, edited by Petr Charvát and Jiří Prosecký (Prague: Oriental Institute, 1996), pp. 207-16.

- Art and architecture

Read : Vivian Mann, "The artistic culture of Prague Jewry." In *Prague. The Crown of Bohemia, 1347-1437*, edited by Barbara Drake Boehm and Jiří Fayt (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005), pp. 82-89.

- Friday, December 8: **In-class assignment #5**