

PROGRAM IN THE HUMANITIES

READING THE ZOHAR

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Spring Semester

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Short description:

The Book of Zohar has been the most important source of inspiration in the field of Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism) ever since it was published at the end of the 13th century, and is the only book to be held sacred other than the Bible and the Talmud. Its value also lies in its poetic characteristics, putting forward unusual ideas, being charged with strong emotions, and abounding in mythical images. Jewish tradition attributes its writing to R. Shimeon Bar Yohay (Rashbi), who lived in the 2nd century CE; however, researchers have convincingly proved that it was written about a thousand years later.

We will start our course with a general introduction to Jewish mysticism, at first, by outlining the motifs taken from the Old Testament, and then by learning how the Jewish mystics of the first millennium tried to recreate the prophets' visions. We will briefly encounter some representative texts of that era, earlier than the Zohar (e.g., Yezira and Bahir). In the last part of our introduction, we will delve into the most intriguing issue concerning the Zohar: what was the process of its writing? Who were its authors? When and where did they live?

We will then focus on one of the Zohar's later strata – a collection of stories which tells the writers' imagined collective autobiography. We will learn how to read such a Zoharic text and how to decipher its symbolism and its poetics.

Assessment*:

Midterm:

In-class exam; 19% of the final grade.

Final requirement (81% of final grade):

Seminar papers are 25 pages long (double-spaced, excluding bibliography).

Referat-papers for seminars taken as electives 10 pages long (double-spaced, excluding bibliography).

Submission dates are set by the university and the Liberal Arts program and must be respected.

* Please note that if distance learning is required, the assessment procedure, modes of assessment and weightings may be changed.

Attendance:

Attendance is mandatory. Students are permitted a maximum of three absences without penalty. Any additional absences will affect the final grade and may result in failure of the course.

Academic conduct:

Plagiarism is taken extremely seriously. Any instance of academic misconduct which includes: submitting someone else's work as your own; failure to accurately cite sources; taking words from another source without using quotation marks; submission of work for which you have previously received credit; working in a group for individual assignments; using unauthorized materials in an exam and sharing your work with other students, will result in failure of the assignment and will likely lead to further disciplinary measures.

Additional requirements:

Keep phones turned-off while in class.