Jewish Illuminated Manuscripts: Torah as Art in Medieval Ashkenaz

Course Description:
Jewish illuminated manuscripts are among the treasured artifacts that have survived the trials of Jewish history and whose imagery provides a window into the Torah worldview of the Jews that commissioned them hundreds of years ago. The Leipzig Mahzor, produced in Worms, Germany in the 14th century, is a collection of *piyyutim* for holidays whose vibrant imagery reflect the teachings of the community’s famed rabbi, R. Eleazar of Worms, the preeminent student of R. Judah the Pious, who led the *Hasidei Ashkenaz* movement. This course will trace the origins and structure of the Jewish communities of the German Rhineland and will provide an overview of their unique teachings and customs related to prayer, repentance, biblical exegesis, and piety. Primary text readings will be complemented with visual studies of the imagery found in the Leipzig Mahzor which was used by the community of Worms on holidays in the synagogue. Images from other contemporaneous Jewish illuminated manuscripts will also be considered. The course will also address the process of writing and illuminating Jewish manuscripts and issues related to art and *Halakhah*.

Course Objectives:
The students will gain an appreciation of the historical background in which the Leipzig Mahzor was produced and how its imagery and that of other illuminated Jewish manuscripts reflect the outlook of the Jewish communities in which they were produced. Students will be exposed to varieties of illumination styles and become familiar with concepts related to iconography and visual culture. Additionally, students will study excerpts of the major texts authored at the time including *Sefer Hasidim* and the *Hilkhot Rokeah* and will employ critical reading skills in analyzing these texts and related imagery.

Course Requirements:
Attendance and Participation (20%)
Midterm (February 2) (40%)
Final (May 18) (40%)

There may be 1-2 short writing assignments which will count towards the midterm/final percentages.

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Spring 2020
ARTS 1975H
JHIS 4934H
JPHI 4933H
**Attendance Policy:** Every student is expected to attend the class meetings and participate in the class discussion. While I understand that there may be circumstances that require you to miss class, if you are absent for more than two meetings your grade will be affected.

**Secondary Readings** are available through E-Res and Canvas. Primary readings will be provided in class.

There may be a museum or rare book/library visit: TBD

Students with disabilities who are enrolled in this course and who will be requesting documented disability-related accommodations should make an appointment with the Office of Disability Services, rkohn1@yu.edu during the first week of class. The office is located in 215 Lexington Ave, Suite 505. Once you have been approved for accommodations, please submit your accommodation letter and discuss any specifics with me to ensure the successful implementation of your accommodations.

**Topics:**

**Introduction**

**Week 1:**

**Part 1: History**

**Week 2**

**Background: The Origins of the Jewish Communities of Ashkenaz**

**Primary Reading:**
Robert Chazan, Church State and Jew in the Middle Ages “Bishop Rudiger of Speyer,” 57-59; “Emperor Henry IV,” 60-63.

**Secondary Readings:**

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Piety and Persecution: The Crusades

*Primary Reading:*
R. Eleazar of Worms: Lamentation for Dolce of Worms.

*Secondary Readings:*

Intellectual History:

Week 3

The Medieval Jewish library:
What did the medieval Jewish library look like?
תורה שבכתב/תורה שבעל פה

*Secondary Readings:*


Part II: Introduction to Manuscript Study

Defining Terms:
Manuscript
Colophon
Codicology
Paleography
Folio
Recto
Verso
Illustration, Illumination
Digital facsimile and Online Resources

Secondary Reading:

The Making of Illuminated Manuscripts
Weeks 4-6

Materials
Scribes (A Female scribe - Oxford Bodleian Library MS Can. Or. 89, fol. 257r)
Vocalizer
Illuminator
Patron
Audience

What kinds of Hebrew texts were illuminated?
Reading:

Live Demonstration of Illumination
Text layout
Parchment selection/preparation
Lining/preparation for writing
Script/paleography
Inks and paints
Gilding
Binding

What is iconography?
Standard Iconography and Jewish Departure
Varieties of Illumination Styles: Spain/Ashkenaz/Italy/Persia (Comparison Assignment)

Is there “Jewish” art?
A response to Christian visual culture: Appropriation and Subversion.
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Secondary Reading:

Artistic representations in Halakhah
Reading:

(Midterm)

Part III: The Thought of Hasidei Ashkenaz:
Piety and Pietism: The Hasidei Ashkenaz Movement
Week 8
Primary Reading:
R. Judah the Pious, Sefer Hasidim, Selections.
R. Eleazar of Worms: Introduction to the Sefer Rokeah: Laws of Piety
Secondary Reading:

Repentance
Week 9
Primary Readings:
R. Eleazar of Worms, Sefer Rokeah: Hilkhot Teshuvah selections.

Secondary Readings:

The Unity of Torah: 50 Sha’are Binah and Biblical Interpretation
Week 10
Primary Readings:
R. Eleazar of Worms, Sodei Razei Smukhim, Introduction
The Book of Esther: R. Eleazar of Worms, Sha’arei Binah, Chapter 1
(Second Writing Assignment)
Prayer and the Siddur

Primary Readings:
R. Judah the Pious, *Sefer Hasidim* (Selections).
R. Eleazar of Worms, Commentary to the Prayers of (Selections).

Secondary Readings:

Part IV: Text and Imagery

Week 11-14

Prayer and Piyyut

Primary Reading:

Secondary Reading:

Image:
Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, MS Voller 1102/I, Mahzor, Worms c. 1310, fol. 27r.

Midrash of the Song of Song as Imagery

Primary Reading:

Images:
Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, MS Voller 1102/I, Mahzor, Worms c. 1310, fol. 64v.
Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, MS Voller 1102/I, Mahzor, Worms c. 1310, fol. 68v.
Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, MS Voller 1102/I, Mahzor, Worms c. 1310, fol. 70v.

Shavuot: Revelation and the Torah Initiation Rite in Ashkenaz

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Primary Reading:
R. Eleazar of Worms: Sefer Rokeah, Laws of Shavuot

Secondary Reading:
Image: Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, MS Voller 1102/I, Mahzor, Worms c. 1310, fol. 130v-131r.

Repentance and Eschatology
Reading:
Sara Offenberg, “Illuminations of Kol Nidre in Two Ashkenazi Mahzorim” in Ars Judaica, 2011, 7-16.
Images:
Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, MS Voller 1102/I, Mahzor, Worms c. 1310, fol. 31v. Michael Mahzor, Bodeleian Library, MS Mich. 627, fol 48r.
Padua Ashkenazi Mahzor, New York Public Library, MS, Heb. 224 fol. 333v.