HISTORY OF THE NEAR EAST 162
ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE HEBREW BIBLE

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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 two “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. 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%), 3-page (900-word) paper (20%, due class III), one-hour final examination last day of class (20%), 15-page (4500-word) final paper (50%, due Monday of exams week). For the 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. *The Jewish Study Bible*, ed. A. Berlin and M. Z. Brettler (Oxford, 2004). Check out the essays and indices in the back. There is also much to be said for using a searchable, online Bible for your research. **RECOMMENDED**

(E-) reserves: code is wp162.

I.A WELCOME/BASIC FACTS

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


I.B HOW (NOT) TO WRITE FOR MY CLASSES

Essay Guide

II.A CULTURE: A GENERAL INTRODUCTION

*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
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?

II.B Realia: Bible and Archaeology
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 III; optional rewrite due 1 week after paper is returned).

III.A Family, Kinship and Ethnicity
B1. OPW Chapter 11


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)

III.B GENDER


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

IV.A THE DEAD AND MOURNING

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


A2. E. Bloch-Smith, “Burials,” The Anchor Bible Dictionary (Doubleday, 1992), vol. 1, pp. 785-89 (in reference); Isaiah 14:4-23; 65:3-4; Jeremiah 16:1-9; 48:36-38; Ezekiel 24:15-23; 26:19-21; 27:30-36; 32:17-32; 37:1-14; Psalms 30:7-13, chh 49; 88; 90; 115:17; Proverbs 15:11; Job chh 1-3; Lamentations; Ecclesiastes chh 2, 3; 7:2; 9:3-6, 2 Chronicles 35:22-25

IV.B GOD, THE GODS AND MAN

B1. OPW Chapters 7-8


A2. 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

V.A TABOO

B1. OPW Chapter 2


V.B Magic: Demonism-Divination-Sorcery-Medicine-Oaths-Curses

A1. OPW Chapters 7-8; M. Douglas, Purity and Danger (Rutledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 58-72


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

VI.A Rites of Passage

A1. OPW Chapter 4


B2. 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

VI.B SACRIFICE

A2. OPW Chapter 3


VII.A SPIRIT POSSESSION-ALTERED STATES
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

VII.B POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

B2. *OPW* Chapters 4, 10


VIII.A CONFLICT RESOLUTION
A1. *OPW* Chapter 9


**VIII.B WARFARE**


**B2. R. L. Carneiro, “Chiefdom-level warfare as exemplified in Fiji and the Cauca Valley,” The Anthropology of War (ed. J. Haas, Cambridge University, 1990), 190-211**

**A1. 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**

**A2. 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; 2 Kings; Isaiah chh 10; 31; 63:1-6; Joel ch 4; Micah 4:1-5; Psalms ch 18; 46:9-12**

**IX.A COSMOLOGY AND CREATION**


**A. One** of the following books (all on reserve at Library):
IX.B Mythic Temporal Loops


B. 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

X.A Literacy


X.B FINAL EXAMINATION
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. 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
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. 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 beginner 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; it will try to conceal obscurities.
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 the “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 meant to Jews/Christians, what it should mean today? Only the first is relevant for this course, though the second is an equally valid field of 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 correct, 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.

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!”