



Fall 2018 Me'ah Classic Year Two at Hebrew College, Newton, MA

Welcome Message from the Instructor, Rabbi Benjamin Samuels

Hi adult learners of Me'ah Medieval at Hebrew College,

My name is Rabbi Benjamin Samuels and I look forward to studying with you Medieval Jewish history this fall in the Me'ah Program. Every semester of Me'ah tells the fascinating story of a formative period in the development of Jewish civilization. This was true of the Biblical and Rabbinic Periods, and is no less true for Medieval Jewish history when Rabbinic Judaism decisively became the Judaism of world Jewry, and continued to evolve in new cultural settings, amidst changing historical circumstances.

We will narrative this development through the analyses of primary texts that serve as historical witnesses, as well as chart further changes in all aspects of Jewish culture, religious and otherwise.

If you would like to do some NON-REQUIRED preparatory summer reading, here are some suggestions:

First, two **required** books for Medieval Me'ah will Raymond Scheindlin's *Short History of the Jewish People*, and Eli Barnavi's (ed.), *Historical Atlas of the Jewish People*. You can buy these used or new online at Amazon (links below), or new at the [Israel Bookstore](#) or at [Kolbo in Brookline](#). **While I am not assigning summer readings from these books, it may be a good idea to order them now.** Scheindlin's book may be read in advance, if you like.

- https://www.amazon.com/Short-History-Jewish-People-Legendary/dp/0195139410/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1532731559&sr=1-1&keywords=scheindlin+jewish+history
- https://www.amazon.com/Historical-Atlas-Jewish-People-Patriarchs/dp/0805241272/ref=pd_lpo_sbs_14_t_0?encoding=UTF8&psc=1&refRID=HXHDSXAB6NWWB50QM3QX

At Me'ah, we have found that good historical fiction, responsibly informed by academic scholarship, can be a helpful gateway for the adult learner to enter into world of a bygone age. If you enjoy historical fiction, here are three excellent novels to consider. **Please remember, though, that these are fiction. We will not be discussing them in class, so it really doesn't matter which you would choose to read:**

- https://www.amazon.com/Guide-Perplexed-Novel-Dara-Horn/dp/0393348881/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1532731064&sr=8-1&keywords=dara+horn+guide+for+the+perplexed
- https://www.amazon.com/Rashis-Daughters-Book-Joheved-Medieval-ebook/dp/B000UCUX2I/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1532731038&sr=8-1&keywords=rashi%27s+daughter
- https://www.amazon.com/People-Book-Novel-Geraldine-Brooks/dp/0143115006/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1532731086&sr=1-1&keywords=people+of+the+book+by+geraldine+brooks

Finally, for those who prefer non-fiction, here are two further recommendations.

Sacred Trash is an extraordinary work that explains the process by which Jewish history has been reconstructed by scholars. It is well written and accessible. Reading this book, at least its first half, will illuminate the scholarly enterprise through a gripping tale of academic fate and destiny. For those who do not wish to read this before the course, you may also consider reading this after your graduate Me'ah to provide a "behind the scenes" look at how history gets written.

- https://www.amazon.com/Sacred-Trash-Geniza-Jewish-Encounters/dp/080521223X/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1532731293&sr=1-1&keywords=sacred+trash

Medieval Europe, A Short History is a college 101 text book that surveys the history of Western (Christian) Europe. It is an easy and accessible read and provides a great refresher of Western Civilization. While there is no need to read this to have a full Me'ah Medieval experience, it does give added dimension to the study of medieval Jewish history by introducing us to the larger historical context.

- https://www.amazon.com/gp/offer-listing/0072346574/ref=sr_1_sc_1_olp?ie=UTF8&qid=1532731393&sr=8-1-spell&keywords=hollister+medieval+europe+a+short+history

I close by sharing how excited I am to embark on this learning journey of spirit and mind with you this coming Fall. **Just to reiterate, all of the above recommendations are not required, and should you not read any of them, you will still have an amazing learning experience.** However, for those for whom the break has been too long since the Spring term and the upcoming Fall term, here are some options.

Wishing you and yours a wonderful remainder of the summer, and a sweet, happy and healthy New Year.

Rav Benjie

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