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Course Syllabus

RELS 3000

Angels and Demons in 'Biblical' Folklore

TR 5:00-6:15

Dr. John C. Reeves

204B Macy

Office hours: TR 3:30-4:30; W 5:00-6:00; or by appointment

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'... we need to study rationally the history of irrationality.' — Israel Jacob Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (trans. Barbara Harshav and Jonathan Chipman; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 289.

Course Description

The Abrahamic religions of the Near East are replete with stories and traditions featuring an indeterminate number of supernal entities which do not formally count as 'deities,' but which nevertheless exhibit knowledge and behavior which is unmistakably 'deity-like.' These entities are typically cataloged under the seemingly self-explanatory labels 'angel' and 'demon.' In this course we will engage in the close reading of a large number of narrative and ritual texts which feature such characters in an attempt to gain a better understanding of the variegated roles they play in pre-modern Jewish, Christian, and Islamic religious contexts. Careful attention will also be given to the cultural issues surrounding the generation and promulgation of competing character profiles within the scriptures of these kindred religions.

Warning: In this class you will hear or read ideas which may disturb, shock, dismay, or outrage you, and you

will be compelled to think using methodological paradigms which you may deem troubling, wrong-headed, blasphemous, or even sacrilegious. If you think you might be uncomfortable in this situation, then this is definitely not the class for you. On the other hand, if you think you can suspend your uncritical attachments to certain notions about scriptures, their meaning, and the circumstances surrounding their production, then you will undoubtedly learn a great deal about the historical and cultural matrices betwixt which Judaism, Christianity, and Islam arose and flourished.

Texts

The following textbooks are required for this course:

- *Tanakh, The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (Philadelphia & Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985).
- *The Qur'an* (trans. M. A. S. Abdel Haleem; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Bible* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1956).
- Students will also frequently consult various Christian Bibles, so-called apocrypha and pseudepigrapha (Jewish, Christian, and Muslim), other parascriptural works and collections, rabbinic and patristic literature, and classical *hadīth* and *tafsīr* collections. Much of this material is available via the links on the class website..

Often supplementary readings will be assigned and/or distributed by the instructor as needed.

Course Requirements

a. Readings. The nature of this course entails a significant amount of close reading and reflection. Students are responsible for anticipating and completing the required reading assignments in a timely manner. Ginzberg's *Legends* must be read in its entirety (averaging roughly 45 pages a week for 15 weeks).

b. Take-home written exercises. An indeterminate number of written exercises (at least one per week; optimally one per class) will be prepared and submitted for in-class discussion and out-of-class evaluation. These exercises vary in length from less than one (1) to a maximum of three (3) typewritten or electronically printed pages. All of these exercises will be announced and explained by the instructor during the course of or at the conclusion of a class meeting. The instructor's evaluation of the student's collective written exercise performance (based on the scale $\sqrt{+} = A^-$; $\sqrt{=} = C^+$; $\sqrt{-} = D$) will comprise 40% of the course grade.

c. Research project. One (1) formal research project to be presented in written form (no less than 10 and no more than 15 double-spaced pages, excluding notes and list of sources). The parameters for this paper are outlined later in the syllabus. This paper is due the final day of class (April 29) and accounts for 35% of the course grade.

d. Individual involvement. Almost perfect attendance (see below) is an essential requirement for this course. Each class meeting builds upon the knowledge gained during previous meetings. Moreover, in-class discussion and analysis comprises a significant portion of every class meeting. Preparation for every class usually involves the completion of a series of assigned readings and/or written assignment(s). Students are expected to contribute in an informed manner to the public analysis and discussion of any assigned topic, and the instructor reserves the right to administer occasional unannounced 'pop-quizzes' should he deem the situation so warrants (grades for such quizzes are averaged with those of the take-home exercises). The

instructor's assessment of one's attendance, class preparation, and informed oral contributions will constitute 25% of the final course grade.

e. Zakhor (Remember!): Mastery of the assigned readings and diligent class attendance are necessary prerequisites for the successful completion of this course. Each student is responsible for all lectures, class discussions, assignments, and announcements, whether or not he/she is present when they occur.

Miscellaneous Information

a. The grading scale used in this course is as follows:

91-100	A	= demonstrable mastery of material; can creatively synthesize
81-90	B	= some demonstrable proficiency in control of material & analysis
71-80	C	= satisfactory performance of assignments; little or no analysis
61-70	D	= inadequate and/or faulty understanding of material
0-60	F	= unacceptable work

b. One of the requirements of this course is to complete the work of the course on time. Sometimes there are legitimate reasons for late work—an illness or other emergency. 'Emergency,' however, does not include your social involvements, travel plans, job schedule, disk and/or printer failures, the state of your love life, your obligations to other courses, or general malaise over the state of the world. The world has been in a mess as long as anyone can remember, and most of the world's work is done by people whose lives are a mass of futility and discontent. If you haven't learned yet, you had better learn now to work under the conditions of the world as it is. **Therefore:**

1) All missed quizzes, unwritten reports, or neglected homework exercises will be averaged as a 0 in the computation of the course grade. There is no such thing as a 'make-up pop quiz.' No exceptions will be considered or granted.

2) All papers and written exercises are due on the dates scheduled in the syllabus, or on the date announced by the instructor in class (usually the next class meeting). 'Late' submissions of papers (not homework exercises — see below) bear the following penalties: one day late/one letter grade; two days late/two letter grades; three or more days late/F. Please note: these 'days' are calendar days, not class meeting days. For accounting purposes, letter grades bear the following values: A=95; A-=92; B=85; C+=78; C=75; D=65; F=30. An untyped submission automatically receives the grade F, as do those typed papers which violate the required parameters or which the instructor deems physically unacceptable and/or grammatically incomprehensible.

3) Homework exercises are due on the date announced by the instructor in class. Since we will normally discuss these exercises together in class on that date, it would clearly be unfair to those who submitted their work on time for me to accept 'late' work from those who were privy to our in-class discussion. Hence I will not accept 'late' homework submissions (even from those physically absent during our discussion); however, 'early' submissions are always welcome and will receive full credit.

4) Attendance at class meetings will be monitored by the instructor. One or two absences are somewhat understandable, three (3) is the limit of tolerability. Each successive absence lowers the Individual Involvement

component of your assessment by one letter grade; seven (7) or more earns an automatic F in that component. Please note that the instructor does not distinguish 'excused' from 'unexcused' absences. Unsanctioned late arrivals and early departures will be tallied as absences.

5) Policy regarding Audits: the instructor expects auditors (whether formally enrolled as such or not) to meet the same attendance, preparation, and oral participation standards as those students who are taking the course for credit. The instructor does not expect auditors to prepare and submit any written assignments.

c. Assistance and solicitation of criticism is your right as a member of the class. It is not a privilege to be granted or withheld. Do not hesitate to request it nor wait too late in the course for it to be of help.

Rough Course Outline

1. Introduction to Abrahamic scriptures: terminology

- a. applied to Jewish Bibles
- b. applied to Christian Bibles
- c. applied to Qur'ān
- d. the problematic notion of 'rewritten Bible'

Required:

Shalom Spiegel, "Introduction," in Ginzberg, *Legends*, xi-xxxix.

Q 2:30-39; 7:11-27; 15:26-50; 17:61-65; 18:50; 20:116-123; 38:71-85

2. Gauging some contours of the divine realm

- a. celestial

Required:

Isa 6:1-8; 1 Kgs 22:19-22; Ps 82:1-7; Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7; Dan 7:9-10; Ezek 1:1-28; *1 Enoch* 14:8-25; *Jubilees* 2:1-3.

Q 2:30; 2:255; 7:54; 10:3; 11:7; 39:75; 40:7; 69:17.

- b. underworld

Required:

Isa 5:14; Isa 8:19-22 (cf. 29:4); Job 3:11-19 (cf. Isa 14:9-15); Job 7:9; 1 Sam 28:7-19; Deut 14: 1 (cf. Jer 16:6; 41:5); Deut 26:14.

Q 37:40-74.

- 3. Various 'angel' texts

Required:

To be assigned

4. Various 'demon' texts

Required:

Isa 13:19-22; 34:5-15 (cf. Bar 4:30-35); Lev 16:1-34; Lev 17:1-7; Deut 32:17 (cf. Bar 4:7); Ps 106:37; Psalm 91; *1 Enoch* 15:1-16:1; *Jubilees* 10:1-14

5. Case study #1

Required:

Hārūt wa-Mārūt legends

6. Case study #2

Required:

Tobit

7. Concluding remarks and reflections

Research Project Parameters

Ginzberg's *Legends* contains a plethora of tales tied to the 'scriptural' stream of discourse which feature angels and/or demons in the running story or narrative. Choose one of these tales and perform a close comparative reading of the various versions of that tale in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim literary sources. You will need of course to research the relative ages and provenances of these sources in order to comment intelligently about possible influences or borrowings. And remember – this is a literary, not a theological, investigation. Are the angels (and/or demons) present in one or more of the 'canonical' forms of the scriptural narrative? If so, how do (or even should) they compare to one another? If not, why do you think they were introduced? Are there textual cues or gaps which might have generated these 'extra' characters? Are they 'survivals' of an earlier stage of narrative integrity? What is gained by the presence (or absence) of such characters in the tale? Papers must combine the student's analysis of the primary texts with information gathered from credible secondary sources (i.e., recognized academic sources: no Wikipedia or similar flotsam gleaned from self-declared internet *magoi* or the 'new age' or 'inspirational' sections of a local book vendor). Length: no less than ten (10), but no longer than fifteen (15) double-spaced and appropriately marginated typed pages, not counting notes (if you use endnotes) and a list of sources.

Supplemental Bibliography for RELS 3000 Angels & Demons

In response to student requests for recommendations regarding useful and enlightening discussions of certain topics, themes, and personalities that are presented in class and/or readings, I offer the following suggestions for further study at the student's leisure. I confine myself to materials which I myself have used with profit and which are currently available at Atkins Library.

It is often helpful for the student to begin with appropriate articles in the standard Bible dictionaries. The best is *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (6 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1992). Also reliable are *The Interpreters' Dictionary of the Bible* (4 vols.) and its *Supplementary Volume* (ed. George A. Buttrick; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962 & 1976), and the *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (ed. Paul J. Achtemeier; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985). A new edition of *The Interpreters' Dictionary* is currently in preparation. Highly recommended are the relevant articles in the new *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (22 vols.; Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA/Thomson Gale, 2007); the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2d ed.; 12 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1954-2002); and the truly wonderful

Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān (6 vols.; ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe; Leiden: Brill, 2001-2006).

Almost all English-language so-called 'encyclopedias' or 'dictionaries' of angels (or demons) are worthless. The lone exception is the *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (2d rev. ed.; ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter van der Horst; Leiden: Brill, 1999), an important tool which Atkins does not own.