

*Department of History: University of Pennsylvania*

**History 490: The Transformation of Jewish Culture in Early Modern Europe**

David B. Ruderman  
Spring, 2013

Tuesday: 3:00 pm-5:30 pm  
Office Hours: Tuesday 2-3:00 pm  
and by appointment

[Ruderman@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:Ruderman@sas.upenn.edu)

*This course attempts to define and describe a distinct era in Jewish cultural and social history roughly between 1500-1800. Early modernity for Jews represents more than a transition from the Middle Ages to Modernity and needs to be viewed as a critical stage in the formation of Jewish civilization. The course focuses on five markers of the period: enhanced mobility of communities and individuals; communal cohesiveness and laicization; a knowledge explosion engendered by the printing press and the University; a crisis of authority precipitated by radical messianism; and the blurring of religious, social, and cultural boundaries, especially between Jews and Christians. The course looks at these trends by studying comparatively the Jewish communities of Italy, the western Sephardim, the Germanic communities, and those of Poland-Lithuania and the Ottoman Empire.*

*General Requirements: Assigned readings for each class plus a research paper 12-15 pp. in length to be chosen in consultation with the instructor*

**Required and Supplementary Reading:**

David. B. Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History* (Princeton, 2010)  
[individual chapters to be read in preparation for each week]

For additional bibliography, consult David B. Ruderman, "Early Modern Jewry", Oxford Bibliographies on Line

**1. January 21, 2014: *Organizational Meeting, Preview of the Class: Course Objectives and Design***

**2. January 28, 2014: *Introduction: Reflections on Jonathan Israel's Book and the Study of Early Modern Jewish History*  
*Some General Perspectives about Cultural Transformation in Early Modern Europe***

**Readings:**

Jonathan Israel, European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism 1550-1750, pp. v-xiii, 1-28

Randolph Starn, "The Early Modern Muddle," Journal of Early Modern History 6 (2002): 296-307

Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia," Modern Asian Studies 31 (1997): 735-62 [Reprinted in Victor Liebermann, ed. Beyond Binary Histories: Re-Imagining Eurasia to c. 1800 (Ann Arbor, 1999), pp. 289-316]

**3. February 4, 2014: *Notions of "Renaissance", "Baroque", "Early Modern", and "Modern" in Recent Jewish Historiography***

**Readings:**

Shmuel Feiner and David Ruderman, eds. Reconsidering the Borderlines between Early Modern and Modern Jewish History, Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts, 6 (2007), pp. 23-45, 49-66, 169-87

Robert Bonfil, "Changes in the Cultural Patterns of a Jewish Society in Crisis: Italian Jewry at the Close of the Sixteenth Century," Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy, ed. David Ruderman, 1992, 401-25

Yosef Kaplan, "An Alternative Path to Modernity," in Kaplan, An Alternative Path to Modernity: The Sephardi Diaspora in Western Europe, 2000, 1-28

Moshe Rosman, How Jewish is Jewish History?, 2007, pp. 56-81

**4. February 11, 2014: *Five Essential Features of Early Modern Jewish Culture: A. Mobility, Social Mixing, Inter-Communal Encounters and Conflicts, and the Restructuring of Jewish Identity***

**Readings:**

Moshe Idel, "On Mobility, Individuals and Groups: Prolegomenon for a Sociological Approach to Sixteenth-Century Kabbalah," Kabbalah 3 (1998): 145-73.

Yosef Kaplan, "Amsterdam and Ashkenazi Migration in the Seventeenth Century," in An Alternative Path to Modernity, pp. 78-107.

Jonathan Israel, Diaspora Within a Diaspora: Jews, Crypto-Jews and the World Maritime Empires 1540-1740 (Leiden, 2002), pp. 1-39.

**5. February 18, 2014: *B. New Forms of Communal Cohesiveness: Ghetto Structures, The Council of Four Lands, Ottoman Autonomy, and the Decline of Rabbinic Authority***

**Readings:**

Adam Teller, "The Laicization of Early Modern Jewish Society: The Development of the Polish Communal Rabbinate in the Sixteenth Century," in Michael Graetz, ed., Schoepferische Momente des

europäischen Judentums in der frühen Neuzeit (Heidelberg, 2000), 333-349

Stefanie B. Siegmund, The Medici State and the Ghetto of Florence. The Construction of an Early Modern Jewish Community (Stanford 2006), pp. 407-412.

Daniel Swetschinski, Reluctant Cosmopolitans: The Portuguese Jews of Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam (London, 2000), pp. 184-187, 221-22

**6. February 25, 2014: C. *Knowledge Explosion I: The Printing Press as an Agent of Cultural Change: Books and New Modes of Reading; The Breakdown of Cultural Barriers between Jewish Communities; Jewish Writers in the Vernacular; Printing and the Emergence of Secondary Elites***

**Readings:**

Joseph Hacker and Adam Shear, eds. The Hebrew Book in Early Modern Italy, 2011, pp. 1-16

Elhanan Reiner, "A Biography of an Agent of Culture: Eleazar Altschul of Prague and his Literary Activity," in Michael Graetz, ed. Schoepferische Momente des europäischen Judentums in der frühen Neuzeit (Heidelberg, 2000), 229-247

Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "Censorship, Editing, and the Reshaping of Jewish Identity: The Catholic Church and Hebrew Literature in the Sixteenth Century," in A. Coudert and J. Shoulson, Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe (Philadelphia, 2004), pp. 125-55

**7. March 4, 2014 : C. *Knowledge Explosion II: Expansion of Cultural Horizons: Rhetoric, Autobiography, and History; Music and Art; Medicine, Magic, Natural Philosophy; The Jewish Student in the University; The Christian Reader of Hebrew Books: Christian Kabbalah, Catholic and Protestant Hebraism and its Impact on Jewish Self-Perception***

**Readings:**

David Ruderman, "The Italian Renaissance and Jewish Thought," in Albert Rabil Jr., ed., Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms and Legacy, vol. 1 (Philadelphia, 1988), pp. 382-433

David Ruderman, Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe, 2000, pp. 100-17, 229-55

Allison Coudert, "Five Seventeenth-Century Christian Hebraists," in Coudert and Shoulson, Hebraica Veritas?, pp. 286-308.

**8. March 18, 2014: D. *The Crisis of Traditional Authority: Messianism, Radical Enthusiasm, and Heresy***

**Readings:**

Elisheva Carlebach, The Pursuit of Heresy: Rabbi Moses Hagiz and the Sabbatian Controversies, 1990, pp. 75-121

Jacob Barnai, "The Spread of the Sabbatean Movement in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in Sophia Menache, Communication in the Jewish Diaspora, 1996, 313-37

Matt Goldish, The Sabbatean Prophets (Cambridge, Mass., 2004), pp. 8-40

**9. March 25, 2014: *E. The Blurring of Religious Identities, or Mingled Identities: Conversos, Jewish Converts to Christianity, Syncretism and the Secularization of European Culture***

**Readings:**

Robert Bonfil, "Dubious Crimes in Sixteenth-Century Italy: Rethinking the Relations Between Jews, Christians, and Jews in Pre-Modern Europe," in The Jews of Spain and the Expulsion of 1492, eds. Moshe Lazar and Stephen Haliczer, 1997, 299-310

Elliot Wolfson, "Messianism in the Christian Kabbalah of Johann Kemper," in Goldish and Popkin, Jewish Messianism in the Early Modern World, 138-87

Pawel Maciejko, "Christian Elements in Early Frankist Doctrine," Gal-Ed 20(2006):13-41

**10. April 1, 2014: *Epilogue: The Early Modern Period and the Haskalah: Rethinking the Beginnings of Modernity in Jewish History* and guest speaker**

**11. April 8, 2014: guest speaker**

**12. April 22, 2014: To be rescheduled: oral presentations of research papers**

**13. April 29, 2014: Participation in the Gruss Colloquium of the Katz Center Research Paper Due**