Ginsburg Ingerman Overseas Students Program
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

Lost and Isolated Jewish Communities
Spring Semester
13-5-410

Dr. Steven J. Klein
Email: stevekhaaretz@gmail.com

Course Description

The phenomenon of Jewish lost tribes is rooted in the history and legends of the Jewish people dating back to the First Temple Period. While the Bible – backed by archaeological evidence – tells us that Assyria exiled 10 Northern Tribes of Israel in the 8th c. BCE, biblical prophecy foretold the eventual return of these tribes, leading to Israel's ultimate redemption. Class lectures and material include the history and theory of the fate of the Lost Tribes of Israel, a survey of Jewish and Israelite communities living in isolation from mainstream Jewry over the centuries and analysis of their relationship with and/or reintegration into Israeli society.

Course Objectives:

The course strives to give students a deeper understanding of the history of lost and isolated Jewish communities and the intricacies of their relationship with modern-day Israel.

Course Disciplines: Jewish Studies, History, Anthropology

Learning Outcomes:

On successful completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Elucidate the fate of the Lost Tribes of Israel and the search for them over the centuries
2. Distinguish between the varying claims of isolated communities to mainstream Jewry
3. Critically analyze the debate over the acceptance of these groups into Israeli society
4. Recall Israeli legislation and policies regarding communities claiming affinity to Israel
5. Summarize the challenges these communities face in retaining their individual identities
Course Structure:

- Total # of lectures: 13
- Total # of credits: 2
- ECTS (European Credit Transfer System): will be calculated by OSP

Teaching method

The course will be conducted through a combination of formal lectures, class discussion and meetings with representatives of isolated Jewish or Israelite communities both on and off the campus. Lectures and class discussions will be based on weekly reading assignments and handouts. Students will also engage in the subjects by bringing in outside material such as current events articles.

Requirements

Students are expected to actively participate in all class meetings and field trips, present at least one current events article in class and hand in weekly reflections in timely fashion.

Structure of Final Course Grade

1. Participation and reflections: 20%
2. Midterm exam: 30%
3. Final exam: 40%
4. Current events presentation: 10%
Total: 100%

Notes:
* Work handed in late will not be graded
* 2 unexcused missed class meetings = final grade will be lowered an entire grade

Time required for individual work

In addition to attendance in class, students are expected to do their assignments and individual work as follows:
- 2 hours of reading per week
- 6 hours of work on midterm
- 2 hours of work on the presentations
- 8 hours of work on their final
These expectations are approximate and correlate with the module’s ECTS.

Class outline

Note: Readings for each week to be completed in advance are listed under each topic.

1: Introduction – Overview (Mar. 6)

a) Expectations for the semester
b) A question of identity - what differentiates Jews from Israelis or Hebrews
c) Ancient Israel - 2 kingdoms for 12 tribes and Biblical prophecy
d) Identity as a construction: How do we know who we are?

2: After the Fall of the Northern Kingdom: Tracing the 10 Lost Tribes (Mar. 13)

a) Myths historical accounts of the lost tribes
b) Possible paths: the Spice Route vs. the Southern Escape
c) Modern efforts to identify and gather in the lost tribes
d) Debate: to admit or not to admit descendants of lost tribes into Israel


Video: Jacobovici, Simha, "The Quest for the 10 Lost Tribes," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Jr_9EEjHk0.

3: Samaritans: The Ones Who Never Left (March 20)

a) Isolation, then rejection: Left behind in the Holy Land and out of the Second Temple
b) Persecution: Surviving over the centuries
c) Reconciliation: Friends of President Yitzhak Ben Zvi
d) Integration: Samaritans in modern Israeli society


4: Karaites: Real Jews? (March 27)

a) The schism
b) Customs of the Karaites
c) The Holocaust dilemma
d) Coming to terms with the Jewish State


5: Jews of India (Apr. 10)
   a) Legends of the fall
   b) Finding tolerance on the subcontinent
   c) Re-connecting with the Jewish world: Cochin Jews vs. Bene Israel
   d) Challenges of life in Israel


6: Bnei Menashe (Apr. 17)
   a) Changing identity 1: Christian missionaries comes to Manipur
   b) Changing identity 2: From the ancestor Manmassi to the tribe of Menashe
   c) The politics of immigration - absorption into Israel


Take-home midterm due Tuesday, April 24

7: Siyur: Remaining on the fringes of Israeli society (Thursday, April 26)
   a) Site #1: Bnei Israel synagogue and the Jewish Heritage Museum in Lod
   b) Site #2: Karaite synagogue in Ramle and meeting with communal leaders
   c) Site #3: Samaritan synagogue in Holon and meeting with communal leaders
   d)

8: Ethiopian Jews: Descendants of Dan, Scions of Solomon or Lions of Judah? (May 1)
   a) Theories of Ethiopian Jewry's origins
   b) Ethiopian Jewish traditions
   c) From reconnection to rescue to the trauma of repatriation


9: Felas Mura: Readmitting a lost community (May 8)
   a) Leaving the fold - converting to Christianity
   b) Left behind - the role of American groups in reigniting Jewish identity
c) South Wing to Zion - the fight for the right of return

d) Adjustment in Israel


**10: Out of Africa: Hebrew Israelites, Abayudaya and Lemba (May 15)**

a) Hebrew Israelites: From a strange Aliyah and flourishing on the fringes of Israeli society to gradual integration through the army and citizenship

b) Abayudaya: Fighting for legitimacy

c) Lemba: It’s all in the genes, or is it all about tradition?


**11: Siyur: South and East wings to Zion (Thursday, May 24)**

a) Meeting on campus: Abayudaya – 11:00

b) Site #1: Ethiopian Jewish center, Be’er Sheva – 1:30

c) Site #2: African Hebrew Israelites, Dimona

**12: The scourge of persecution: Hidden Jewish communities (May 29)**

a) Conversos and New Christians of Spain and Portugal

b) The Mashad of Iran and Donme of Turkey

c) Lost Jews of the Holocaust in Poland

d) Debate: Who and how to re-convert the forcibly converted?


**13: Converted communities (June 5)**

a) The politicization of the Ingathering

b) The San Nicandro Jews - from a vision in Italy to the farms in the Galilee

c) B’nai Moshe - from disillusioned Catholics in Peru to the West Bank

14: Conclusions: Who is left to ingather and what will be their identity? (June 12)