

Mishnah and Tosefta

The Mishnah is a seminal Jewish text. Compiled around the year 200 CE in ancient Palestine, it became the foundation of the two Talmuds and thus, all later Judaism. But it is still in many ways a mystery: Why was it compiled? Who was its intended audience and what was its function? What are its antecedents?

This graduate seminar has two interlocked goals. One is to strengthen your ability, both linguistic and conceptual, to read and decode the Mishnah and its “companion volume,” the Tosefta (although we will discuss further the nature of their relationship). The second is to survey and gain some facility with modern scholarly approaches to the Mishnah. In the process we will also discuss the social historical and religious implications of our tractate, Sotah.

Instructor Information

Michael Satlow, Professor, Program in Judaic Studies and Department of Religious Studies.

Objectives, Approach, Structure

The goals of this course are:

1. To improve your technical and linguistic ability to deal with the Mishnah, and by extension, other tannaitic texts;
2. To introduce you to the critical study of rabbinic literature;
3. To apply methods of critical reading to a collaborative and close reading of a single tractate, Sotah.

The capstone of the class is the creation of individual commentaries on a chapter of Mishnah. The commentary will be ongoing throughout the semester and will give you an opportunity to apply the critical principles that we read about to a specific text. This is a bit experimental, and we will work out and adjust the precise mechanics throughout the semester.

Our time in class will usually be divided into three parts: Discussion of the secondary reading; reading together, translating, and discussing the primary text from Mishnah Sotah; and discussing issues that arise in your work on your commentary.

Books

All books are on reserve in the library (or available online). Although you are not required to purchase any books, you may want to; some will be useful to you in the future. We will be reading several essays from the *Cambridge Companion* volume and it may be particularly convenient to have this on hand. The other books as well are recommended:

1. Herman Strack and Gunter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Augsburg Fortress Press, 1992; ISBN: 978-0800625245). This is a standard handbook and reference book for rabbinic literature, with a good bibliography up to 1992.

2. C. Fonrobert and M. Jaffee, *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).
3. H. Albeck, *Shishah Sidre Mishnah* (in Hebrew) (Mosad Bialik, original publication 1959; ISBN: 9789650102081). This is the standard base text, with a short Hebrew commentary, for the Mishnah. I recommend buying the full set of six volumes, but an alternative is to buy only the first volume, which contains Peah. It may be out of print.
4. Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (reprint Hendrickson, 2006; ISBN: 978-1565638600). The standard dictionary for rabbinic literature.
5. Miguel Pérez Fernández, trans. John Elwolde, *An Introductory Grammar of Rabbinic Hebrew* (Brill, 1999; ISBN: 978-9004109049). A basic grammar. Unfortunately, this is out of print and may not be available.

Because this is a class geared at more advanced research I have not made pdf copies of the essays. You should access the essays directly from the books. That should also give you an opportunity to acquaint yourself with each book as a whole.

Requirements and Grading

You are expected to attend every class prepared. Preparation includes: (1) reading in full the secondary assignment and having formed some questions and/or reactions to it; (2) preparing the assigned mishnaic text so that you are able to read, translate, and attempt to explain it, using a clean copy and no notes; and (3) having completed the commentary assignment for that day (if applicable).

You will lead the class discussion for one or two sets of secondary readings and one or two actual reading sessions.

Your grade will primarily be determined by your work on the commentary. You will choose a chapter of Mishnah to work on through the semester. Your commentary will then attend to the following details:

1. Critical edition of the text, with noting of manuscript variants;
2. Noting of all parallels found in early Jewish literature;
3. Summary of past scholarship on your text;
4. Redactional commentary – can we discern the Mishnah’s sources and redactional principles? What is its relationship to the relevant passages from the Tosefta and other rabbinic literature?
5. Explanation: What does your passage mean?
6. Intended audience;
7. Assumptions of realia, legal principles and application, etc.
8. Larger conceptual discussion

Drafts of your commentaries will be discussed the last week or two of the semester.

Tentative Schedule

January 27	Introduction
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<p>February 3</p>	<p>Introduction to the Contemporary Study of the Mishnah (and Tosefta) <i>Reading:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strack and Stemberger, <i>Introduction</i>, pp. 119-181 (you need not read this carefully); 2. S. Schwartz, "The Political Geography of Rabbinic Texts," pp. 75-98 in <i>The Cambridge Companion</i>; 3. D. Kraemer, "The Mishnah," in <i>The Cambridge History of Rabbinic Judaism</i>, vol. 4: <i>The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period</i>, pp. 299-315; 4. P. Mandel, "The Tosefta," in <i>ibid.</i>, pp. 316-335; 5. M. Bar-Asher, "Mishnaic Hebrew," in <i>ibid.</i>, pp. 369-403; 6. Essays in <i>AJS Review</i> 32:2 (2008), pp. 221-297 7. Recommended but not required: A. Tropper, "The State of Mishnah Studies," in <i>Rabbinic Texts and the History of Late-Roman Palestine</i> (2010): 91-115 <p><i>Sotah:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Numbers 5:11-31 (prepare the Hebrew text, which we will translate together in class); 2. T. Frymer-Kensky, "The Strange Case of the Suspected Sotah (Numbers V 11-31)," <i>Vetus Testamentum</i> 34:1 (1984): 11-26; 3. J. Milgrom, "On the Suspected Adulteress (Numbers V 11-31)," <i>VT</i> 35:3 (1985): 368-9
<p>February 10</p>	<p>Manuscripts <i>Reading:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. M. Krupp, "Manuscripts of the Mishna," in S. Safrai, ed., <i>The Literature of the Sages</i>, pp. 252-62; 2. Hayim Lapin, "Towards a Digital Critical Edition of the Mishnah," in <i>Envisioning Judaism: Studies in Honor of Peter Schäfer</i>, vol. 1 (2013): 441-464; 3. Familiarize yourself with http://jnul.huji.ac.il/dl/talmud/indexeng.htm and http://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-ADD-00470-00001/7. Can you compare the Albeck version of the first Mishnah of Sotah with those found in MS. Kaufmann and MS Add.470.1? <p>Begin reading Mishnah Sotah.</p>
<p>February 17</p>	<p>Transmission and Orality <i>Reading:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. M. Jaffee, <i>Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism 200 BCE – 400 CE</i>; 2. E. S. Alexander, "The Orality of Rabbinic Writings," pp. 38-57 in

	<p><i>The Cambridge Companion</i></p> <p>Continue reading M. Sotah.</p>
February 24	<p>Mishnah and Scripture</p> <p><i>Reading:</i> J. Kalman, "Building Houses on the Sand: The Analysis of Scripture Citation in the Mishnah," <i>Journal for Semitics</i> 13:2 (2004): 186-244</p> <p>Continue M. Sotah. Be alert to the use of Scripture in this week's reading.</p>
March 2	<p>Mishnah and Midrash</p> <p><i>Reading:</i> D. Weiss Halivni, <i>Midrash, Mishnah, and Gemara: The Jewish Predilection for Justified Law</i></p> <p>Continue reading M. Sotah.</p>
March 9	<p>Mishnah and Tosefta</p> <p><i>Reading:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Judith Hauptman, <i>Rereading the Mishnah: A New Approach to Ancient Jewish Texts</i>, pp. 1-30, 255-264. Other parts of the book relate more directly to M. Sotah; 2. S. Friedman, "The Primacy of Mishnah to Tosefta in Synoptic Parallels," in <i>Introducing Tosefta</i>, ed. H. Fox and T. Meacham, pp. 99-121; 3. J. Kulp, "Organizational Patterns in the Mishnah in Light of their Tosefta Parallels," <i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>, 58 (2007): 52-78 <p>Continue reading M. Sotah. Passages from the Tosefta will also be assigned, depending on where we are in the text.</p>
March 16	<p>Mishnah and History</p> <p><i>Reading:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Naftali Cohn, <i>The Memory of the Temple and the Making of the Rabbis</i> 2. J. Neusner, "Redaction, Formulation, and Form: The Case of Mishnah; with Comments by R. S. Sarason," <i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>, n.s., 70 (1979-1980): 131-152; 3. W. S. Green, "What's in a Name? The Problematic of Rabbinic 'Biography'," in <i>Approaches to Ancient Judaism: Theory and Practice</i> (1978), pp. 77-96 <p>Continue reading M. Sotah</p>

March 23	Mishnah and Jewish Law <i>Reading:</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. S. Cohen, "The Judaeen Legal Tradition and the <i>Halakhah</i> of the Mishnah," in <i>The Cambridge Companion</i>, pp. 121-143; 2. C. Hezser, "Roman Law and Rabbinic Legal Composition," pp. 144-164, in <i>The Cambridge Companion</i>, pp. 144-164; 3. A. Goldberg, "The Mishnah – A Study Book of Halakha," in S. Safrai, ed., <i>The Literature of the Sages</i>, pp. 211-251 <p>Continue reading M. Sotah</p>
April 6	Mishnah and Philosophy <i>Reading:</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. J. Nesuner, <i>Judaism: The Evidence of the Mishnah</i>; 2. S. Cohen, "Jacob Neusner, Mishnah and Counter-Rabbinics," <i>Conservative Judaism</i>, Vol.37(1) Fall 1983 p. 48-63 <p>Continue reading M. Sotah</p>
April 13	Mishnah and Feminist Critique <i>Reading:</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. M. Satlow, "Texts of Terror: Rabbinic Texts, Speech Acts, and the Control of Mores," <i>AJS Review</i> 21:2 (1996): 273-297 2. G. Labovitz, "A Man Spinning on His Thigh," <i>Nashim</i> 28 (2015): 75-87 <p>Continue reading M. Sotah</p>
April 20	Sotah <i>Reading:</i> I. Rosen-Zvi, <i>The Mishnaic Sotah Ritual</i>
April 27	Student Presentations