**Course Syllabus: Women in the Biblical Tradition**

**SCAR / Gendrst 3BW3**

**Professor Hanna Tervanotko**

Online Course

**Contact information:  
Instructor:** Assistantprofessor Dr. Hanna Tervanotko, room 127

**Office hours:** Tuesdays 12:00 – 12:45 or by appointment ([tervanoh@mcmaster.ca](mailto:tervanoh@mcmaster.ca))

**Course work (requirements)**

Grading structure: 10 short writing assignments, each worth 10% of the grade =  100%

You can choose which weeks not to write the essay.

**Short description:** The role and status of women in antiquity is still debated. In this course we will analyze the portrayal of women in Biblical literature taking into consideration some material artifacts. We will read how women are depicted in different genres of literature, and what the ancient authors tell about women within the cultural context of ancient Eastern Mediterranean region. In addition, we will explore some key theories of the Biblical feminist studies. What factors may have influenced the ways in which the ancient authors portrayed women?  By analyzing the portrayal of women and gender in antiquity the course will also provide conceptual tools to engage in contemporary debates concerning them.

**Course learning outcomes:**

* You will distinguish between primary and secondary sources;
* You will derive the main idea of the interpretation history of the ancient texts and dissect its hermeneutical impact for the culturally contingent ideas on women and gender;
* You will identify how in antiquity gender was interpreted in various ways, and compare the different understandings on the role and function of women that different groups held;
* You will demonstrate the use of the theories of the course when participating contemporary discussions on women and gender

**Course material:**

* Access to an English translation of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament and Apocrypha (preferably NRSV). I recommend you to use a physical Bible instead of an app on your phone. All secondary sources (e.g., articles) can be accessed via Avenue to Learn course platform.

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| Week/Class | Date | Topic | Readings |
| 1/1 | 7.-10.9. | Welcome and Introduction to the course | * Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, “Feminist Criticism.” <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/tools/video-gallery/f/feminist-criticism> * Amy-Jill Levine, “What is the Difference between the old Testament, the Tanakh, and the Hebrew Bible?” <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/tools/bible-basics/what-is-the-difference-between-the-old-testament-the-tanakh-and-the-hebrew-bible> * Sarah Shectman, “How do Biblical Scholars read the Hebrew Bible?” <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/tools/bible-basics/how-do-biblical-scholars-read-the-hebrew-bible> |
| 1/2 |  | Introduction to the Biblical Studies:  Material and Methods | * Sara Parks, “Historical-Critical Ministry.” * Sharon Ringe, “When Women Interpret Bible.” * **Weekly writing assignment:** Describe some methods to interpret the Biblical texts. What is problematic with the dominant historical-critical method? What is the purpose of the feminist Biblical interpretation? * **\*Extra\*:** Write an email where you introduce yourself, tell the instructor what are your expectations for this course, why did you choose this course and what are you particularly interested in learning. Is there anything you would like the instructor to know about you? Your email will NOT be graded. |
| 2/1 | 13.-17.9. | Birth of a girl | * Women and daughters in family genealogies * Leonie Archer, “Birth of a girl.” |
| 2/2 |  | Birth of a girl | * Legal context: Daughters of Job (Job 1:1-2; 42:14-15) * Zelophehad’s daughters (Num 27) * Incest: Lot’s daughters (Gen 19) * Amy Kalmanofsky, “Sisters.” * **Weekly writing assignment:** How was the status of a girl according to the ancient Jewish texts? |
| 3/1 | 20.-24.9. | Childhood: education | * King Lemuel’s mother (Prv 31:1) * Tobit 1:1-8 * Esther (Est 9:29, 32) |
| 3/2 |  | Childhood: education | * Female knowledge: purity, fertility, technical knowledge * Leonie Archer, “On Education.” * **Weekly writing assignment:** What do we know about women’s education? Take into account both formal education and other “systems of knowledge”. |
| 4/1 | 27.9.-1.10 | Marriage | * Levirate marriage * Keturah (Gen 25:1-4) * Zipporah (Exod 2:11-23; 4:8-31; 18; Num 12:1) * Joseph’s wife (Gen 41:45, 50-52) * Batsheba (2 Sam 11-12) * Salomon’s foreign wives (1 Kings 11:1-6) * Legislation on beautiful captive woman (Deut 21:10-14) * Prohibitions against intermarriage (e.g., Num 25:7-13; Deut 7:3; Mal 2:11; Ezra 9:1-2, 10:10-11; Neh 10:31) * Tracy Lemos, “Weddings and Marriage Traditions in Ancient Israel” <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/passages/related-articles/weddings-and-marriage-traditions-in-ancient-israel> * Johanna Stiebert, [A Closer Look at Biblical Marriage – The Shiloh Project](https://www.shilohproject.blog/a-closer-look-at-biblical-marriage/) * Athalya Brenner, “Foreign Woman.” |
| 4/2 |  | Unmarried women, divorced, widows | * Gale A. Yee, “She Stood in Tears Amid the Alien Corn: Ruth, the Perpetual Foreigner and Model Minority.” * Vivian Ketchum, “What about Orpah? * **Weekly writing assignment:** Why is marriage such an important topic in the Biblical texts? |
| 5/1 | 4.-7.10. | Slaves | * Hagar (Gen 16, 21) * Watch Jennifer Glancy, “Slavery in Early Christianity”: <https://www.brandeis.edu/projects/fse/conferences/beyond-slavery/videos/jennifer-glancy.html> |
| 5/2 |  | Slaves | * Jayme Reaves, “Sarah as victim and perpetrator: Whiteness, power, and memory in the matriarchal narrative.” * **Weekly writing assignment:** Describe the relationship between free women and slave women in some Biblical texts. |
| 6 |  |  | Midterm break 12.-18.10. Enjoy! |
| 7/1 | 18.-22.10 | Professional women | * Prisca (1 Cor 16:19; Rom 16: 3-5; 2 Tim 4:19) * Phoebe (Rom 16:1-2), also other women in Rom 16 * Euodia and Syntyche (Phil 4:2-3) * Lydia (Acts 16) * Agriculture (Prv 31:16; Josh 15:16-19; cf. Ruth working in the field) * Mill (Exod 11:5; Matt 24:41) * Shepherding (Gen 29:9; Exod 2:16) * Midwives (Exod 1:15) * Nurses ([Gen 35:8](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Gen%2035.8" \t "_blank); Exod 2:7; [2 Sam 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/2%20Sam%204.4); [1 Kings 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/1%20Kings%201.4)) * Professional mourners (Jer 9:17) * Servants (Acts 12:13) * Tentmaking (Acts 18:3) * Commercial tasks (Acts 16:14) |
| 7/2 |  | Professional women | * Babatha archieve: <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/babatha> * <http://cojs.org/anthony-j-saldarini-babathas-story-biblical-archaeology-review-24-2-1998/> * **Weekly writing assignment:** What kind of jobs women could have in antiquity? Don’t just make a list, but try to provide some explanation. |
| 8/1 | 25.-29.10. | Women and Religion | * Hannah in the temple (1 Sam 1:2-2:21) * Woman of Endor (1 Sam 28:3-25) * Miriam (Exod 15:20-21; Num 12:1-15; Micah 6:4) * Deborah (Judg 4-5) * Huldah (2 Kings 22) * Noadiah (Neh 6:14) * Isaiah’s wife (Isa 8:1-4) * Carol Meyers, “Women’s Religious Life.” |
| 8/2 |  | Women and Religion | * Ann Jeffers, “Women’s Rituals.” * <https://theconversation.com/pandemic-cooking-and-jewish-food-rituals-offer-comfort-in-times-of-sickness-150840> * 2 Samuel 13 * **Weekly writing assignment:** How are religious roles of men and women different in ancient texts? |
| 9/1 | 1.-5.11. | Women and leadership | * Miriam: <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/people/main-articles/miriam> * Deborah: <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/people/main-articles/deborah> |
| 9/2 |  | Women and leadership | * Watch video: Jesus’ Female Disciplines: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KV3etSTMSEA> * <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-09-10/the-story-of-jesus-isnt-just-about-men/11481632?fbclid=IwAR3UZblyKI8gBSwrLpOHbX3ksRmRU6wjGtwjzMAlsFvypMdv_ldirJkvIYk> * Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza: <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/tools/video-gallery/w/women-in-early-chrisitanity> * **Weekly writing assignment:** What kind of leadership roles women could have? |
| 10/1 | 8.-12.11. | Women’s aesthetics | * Joseph (Gen 39) * David (1 Sam 16-17) * Absalom (2 Sam 14) * Sarah (Gen 12) * Rebecca (Gen 24; 26) * Rachel (Gen 29) * Tamar (2 Sam 13) * Abigail (1 Sam 25) * Abishaag (1 Kgs 1:1-4) * Esther (Est 2) * Daughters of Job (Job 42:13-15) |
| 10/2 |  | Women’s aesthetics | * Hanna Tervanotko, “Beautiful Men and Women.” * Video: Susanna and the Elders (<http://shiloh-project.group.shef.ac.uk/?p=1605>) * **Weekly writing assignment:** Why is women’s aesthetic beauty so important for the ancient authors? |
| 11/1 | 15.-19.11. | Women and Death | * Sarah (Gen 23:1-20) * Rachel (Gen 35:19-20; 48:7) * Rebecca and Leah (Gen 50:13) * Miriam (Num 20:1) * Gospels – the role of women when Jesus dies? (Matt 26:1-12; Mark 14:8; 16:1; Luke 23:54-56) |
| 11/2 |  | Women and Death | * Byron McCane, “Burial Practices in First Century Palestine” <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/people/related-articles/burial-practices-in-first-century-palestine> * Leonie Archer, “Death.” * **Weekly writing assignment:** How would you describe women’s role in death? |
| 12/1 | 22.-26.11. | Male and female deities | * Aserah in the Bible: <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/asherahasherim-bible> * Did God have a Wife? : <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna42154769> * Watch Francesca Stavrakopoulou: Did God have a Wife? <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2kvw8m> (also available on Facebook) |
|  |  | Male and female deities | * Juliana Claassens, “God as Midwife” * David Wheeler Reed, “What the early church thought about God’s gender”: <https://theconversation.com/what-the-early-church-thought-about-gods-gender-100077> * **Weekly writing assignment:** In your opinion, what has contributed to describe the deity in typically in masculine terms in Jewish and Christian traditions? |
| 13/1 | 29.11.-3.12. | History of Research on Women in the Bible: Current Trends and Future Directions | * Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, “Communication as Communion: Elements in A Hermeneutic of Lo Cotidiano” 27-36 * Nyasha Junior, “Womanist Biblical Interpretation,” 37-46 |
| 13/2 |  | History of Research on Women in the Bible: Current Trends and Future Directions | * Wilson, “Gender Disrupted” * **Weekly writing assignment:** How would you describe new interpretative trends in the study of the Biblical texts?How would you locate these ideas in the current political/cultural ideas? |
| 14/1 | 6.-10.12. |  | * Ilan, “Women’s Daily Lives” * Ancient Near Eastern Laws * Deuteronomy 12-26 * Ten commandments * Summing up; Questions? If you have any questions regarding the course, please reach out to the instructor. |

COURSE POLICIES:

Cellular/smart phones, other handheld devices, and laptop computers

The use of cell/smart phones or other handheld devices will not be allowed in class, not even under the desk or cleverly tucked behind the seat in front of you! Disregarding this rule will result in a deduction of your grade for the course. Laptops are allowed for purposes of the class, but use for other purposes (e-mail, surfing the web, etc.) will also result in the lowering of your overall grade.

Academic integrity

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. The academic credentials that you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and 8 academic integrity. Academic dishonesty is knowingly to act or fail to act in a way that results, or could result, in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.

For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity. The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.

2. Improper collaboration in group work.

3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Plagiarism will not be tolerated, and can be easily avoided by simply citing the source of your information whenever there is any doubt. Please be sure to do this – better safe than sorry!

Avenue to Learn

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

Turnitin.com

In this course we may use a web-based service (turnitin.com) to reveal plagiarism. Students will be expected to submit their work electronically through Avenue, where it will be run through turnitin.com to check for academic dishonesty. Students who do not wish to submit their work to turnitin.com must still submit a copy to the instructor. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to turnitin.com; however, the instructor will still assure (by other means) that standards of academic integrity have been upheld. To see the turnitin.com policy, please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

Academic accommodation of students with disabilities

Students who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Academic accommodations must be arranged for each term of study. Student Accessibility Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or e-mail at sas@mcmaster.ca. For further information, consult McMaster University’s Policy for Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities (http://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/StudentsAcademicStudies/AcademicAccommodationStudentsWithDisabilities.pdf).

Modifications to this course

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme 9 circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check her/his McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

E-mail communication

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all email communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student’s own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

McMaster Student Absence Form

The McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF) (http://www.mcmaster.ca/msaf/) is a selfreporting tool for Undergraduate Students to report MEDICAL absences that last up to 3 days and provides the ability to request accommodation for any missed academic work (that is less than 25% of the course grade). Please note that this tool cannot be used during any final examination period. You may submit a maximum of ONE Academic Work Missed request per term. It is YOUR responsibility to follow up with your instructor immediately regarding the nature of the accommodation. If you are absent for more than 3 days, exceed one request per term, are absent for a reason other than medical, or have missed work worth 25% or more of the final grade, you MUST visit your Faculty Office. You may be required to provide supporting documentation. This form should be filled out when you are about to return to class after your absence.

Late Submission

Late submission of any course work may affect the grade. Late submissions should always be negotiated with me.

Contacting the instructor

Your first contact is the course Teaching Assistant, for logistical questions about the course, reporting absences, or matters relating to accessing the readings. If he cannot answer your question, or if your concern is of a sensitive nature, please email me. I will make an effort to answer emails in a timely manner, but do not expect an answer to emails between the hours of 6 PM and 9 AM. For anything that cannot be answered by the syllabus, contact me. Come by at our posted office hours or make an appointment to meet.