NOTHING BUT THE FACTS

A while back I heard another of those commentaries about the sad state of American education, in this case college education. Look at how little students know, they said: the Bill of Rights, the crucial presidents, basic names from classic literature. Shocking, they said, shocking! It occurred to me that it was ridiculous to measure college education by lists of facts that we were supposed to learn in high school or before. University studies are about more than learning lists of facts – and indeed they are.

Then I found myself talking with a colleague about teaching big introductory courses and was casting about for something fresh and fun and it suddenly occurred to me: What if I did build my Ancient Israel course around a list of facts, but I pushed myself to come up with my own most important facts on my own terms, not as names and dates but as essential perspectives and conclusions?

This course is the result of my effort to compose such a list and to try it out as a way to introduce ancient Israel. Every class session will revolve around one “fact,” as defined by your professor, anchored to both primary evidence and secondary readings that relate. There will be daily preparations that will lay the groundwork for discussion of each of my declarations, and the two in-class exams will be structured around them as well.

No textbook has been written to suit either this format or my particular ideas, so the readings have been assembled piecemeal, according to each topic. I want you all to be equipped with the same annotated Bible translation and with a fairly simple Bible “atlas” as regular references, though much of the evidence for the course reaches outside the Bible and the Bible is never a simple authority for history. As you will see, the course will begin with large framing considerations and then will move in the second half to what may be called “history from below,” or more technically, “social history,” focused on everyday life and experience, ending with religion.

GRADED WORK:

General note: Recently I have shifted my grading pattern to incorporate regular written work in the form of regular written assignments as preparation for class, worth 20% of the grade. These will be graded quickly on a scale of 1-10, to be multiplied as if by ten (9.5 = 95%, etc.), and they are essential for the success of our class meetings. These preparations
will apply to more than half of class sessions and will only be announced at the end of class, one encouragement to be there. The style of the preparations varies, with some focused on problem-solving and some more creative or speculative; they will not be drab reports on the reading. Please take them extremely seriously, as we shall.

1. BREAKDOWN OF GRADING:
   a. Daily projects and class engagement (20%): The definitions for each preparatory exercise will be provided at the end of the previous class. Each preparation should be between one and two pages long, double-spaced, 12-point font. **NOTE: These preparations will only be accepted on the day they are due. Any accumulation of undone assignments will have a serious adverse effect on total grades. THE PRINTED COPY MUST BE HANDED IN DURING CLASS.**
   b. Two in-class exams (one hour and fifteen minutes each) (15% each): Each exam will be framed by the 25 “facts” that define the shape of the course.
   c. Two six-page papers (20% each)
   d. Full participation in recitation sections, as asked by your instructor (10%)

2. THE TWO PAPERS:
   Instructions for each paper will be posted on NYU Classes well in advance of each assignment. Here are brief descriptions:
   a. Paper no. 1 (6 PAGES) – DUE MONDAY, OCTOBER 1: The first paper is intended to develop skill in careful reading and analysis of primary evidence, the raw material for any knowledge or comprehension. The project this year is designed to confront directly the need to sketch a picture of the past from all available evidence. For the Bible, the single best opportunity to do this is found with the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem during the reign of Hezekiah, because we have detailed material from multiple biblical texts as well as from multiple records from Sennacherib. You will need to consider the variety within each set of evidence, one from Judah and one from Assyria, before you attempt a historical explanation that takes both sets into account. No secondary reading is to be consulted.
   b. Paper no. 2 (6 PAGES) – DUE WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 5. This second paper is intended to send you into the “secondary literature,” what others have written on a given topic. Unlike the first paper, this one will allow a range of potential topics, each picking up from some element of the secondary literature associated with preparation for the individual “facts” of each class session.

READING:
   Only two texts have been ordered for the course: the Jewish Study Bible from the Jewish Publication Society, so all will have the same translation for work with the Bible; and the Oxford Bible Atlas for reference to places in Israel. This atlas may be used more often in sections than in the main class meetings, but it will be important for knowing where you are and for having a basic grasp of the lay of the land for each main period.
ADMINISTRATION:

TEACHING STAFF:
Daniel Fleming, Edelman Professor of Hebrew and Judaic Studies, df2@nyu.edu
Ki-Eun Jang, doctoral student in Hebrew Bible, section instructor, kieun.jang@nyu.edu
Jonathan Schmidt-Swartz, doctoral student in Hebrew Bible, section instructor, schmidtswartz@nyu.edu
Office hours for the professor: Monday and Wednesday 1:00 – 2:00 PM.
Office hours for section instructors as set individually.
Prof. Fleming’s telephone is 212-998-8985, but the most reliable way to make rapid contact is by email.

The Skirball Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies
Yarmine Fernandez, administrative assistant, 212-998-8980
53 Washington Square South, first floor (enter at right of elevators, to right from atrium)
Prof. Fleming’s office, room 211, second floor from inside department, to back on left
Prof. Fleming’s mailbox, behind staircase on first floor, middle of top row (for turning in late papers)

POLICIES:
Grading for this course will be shared by the professor and the section instructors. Students will be graded on a regular basis by their section instructors, but I will take at least an equal share of each assignment and try to grade each student’s work at least once during the semester. The three teaching staff will meet to compare grades in each case, so that we come as close as possible to matching evaluations. I take final responsibility for every grade, within the following structure. If you believe that your grade is in error or not fair, please approach first the person who graded the work, for review. If you are still not satisfied after your section instructor reconsiders a grade, you may submit it to the professor, whose judgment is final. I have a bias toward supporting the careful decisions of the instructors.

Late papers will be graded down as follows. Up to and including one week, one grade fraction (e.g. B to B-); more than one week, through the end of the term, one full grade (e.g. B to C). IF YOU HAVE ANY PROBLEM MEETING DEADLINES, INFORM YOUR SECTION INSTRUCTOR OR THE PROFESSOR AS SOON AS YOU ARE AWARE OF IT. It is always possible to consider special circumstances, to be judged on an individual basis. Again, the professor takes final responsibility for deciding how to handle individual requests about problems.
CLASS SESSIONS: 25 FACTS ABOUT ANCIENT ISRAEL

PART I: FRAMING ANCIENT ISRAEL

A. DEFINITIONS

1. (SEPTEMBER 5) DEFINING ISRAEL

2. (SEPTEMBER 10, Rosh Hashana, New Year) THE ROLE OF THE BIBLE
   EVIDENCE: 2 Kings 17

3. (SEPTEMBER 12) THE QUESTION OF UNIQUENESS
   EVIDENCE: the Mesha Inscription from ancient Moab (Context of Scripture vol.2)

4. (SEPTEMBER 17) FOREIGNNESS TO US
   EVIDENCE:
   Psalm 82 (my translation)

B. HISTORY

5. (SEPTEMBER 19, Yom Kippur, Day of Atonement) DEFINING HISTORY
   EVIDENCE: Inheritance by a “prostitute” from 13th-century BCE Syria (Emar VI.3 31)
   READING:


6. **(SEPTEMBER 24) ISRAEL AND JUDAH**

EVIDENCE: 1 Kings 12:1-24

READING:


7. **(SEPTEMBER 26) BIBLE BEGINNINGS AND EGYPT**


READING:


8. **(OCTOBER 1) THE ROLE OF ARCHAEOLOGY: << FIRST PAPER DUE >>**


READING:

William Dever, “Retrospects and Prospects in Biblical and Syro-Palestinian Archaeology,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 45 (1982) 103-7 (available through JSTOR; can be found through *Near Eastern Archaeology*, its new name).


9. **(OCTOBER 3) HISTORY FROM BELOW**


READING:


C. THE POLITICS OF ISRAEL

10. (OCTOBER 9, CLASS ON TUESDAY, No Class on Monday, Columbus Day) ISRAEL POLITICALLY

EVIDENCE: the Merenptah Stele; the Kurkh Monolith of Shalmaneser III king of Assyria (from Mordechai Cogan, The Raging Torrent [Jerusalem 2008])

READING:
Avraham Faust, Israel’s Ethnogenesis, 163-66.

11. (OCTOBER 10) ANCESTORS AND BURIAL


READING:
Patricia McAnany, Living with the Ancestors (Austin 1995), introduction (GET pages).
Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, “Death and Burial, Bronze and Iron Age,” in Daniel Master ed., The Oxford Encyclopedia of Bible and Archaeology (Oxford 2013), 254-62 (available through academia.edu by author’s name).

12. (OCTOBER 15) JERUSALEM

EVIDENCE: Judges 5; 2 Samuel 5; 1 Kings 22; Isaiah 6

READING:

13. (OCTOBER 17) POLITICS AND WOMEN

EVIDENCE: Judges 5; 2 Kings 11

READING:
Susan Ackerman, Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen (New York 1998), Chapter 1, “Deborah, Women, and War,” pages to be selected.

Reading on Athaliah.

OCTOBER 22: FIRST IN-CLASS EXAM
PART II: HISTORY FROM BELOW: REAL LIFE ISRAEL

D. STAYING ALIVE

14. (OCTOBER 24) LENGTH OF LIFE
EVIDENCE: Genesis 35:16-21; Ecclesiastes/Qohelet 3
READING:

15. (OCTOBER 29) VIOLENCE
EVIDENCE: Genesis 34; 2 Samuel 13;
READING:
Yael Shemesh, “Rape is Rape is Rape: The Story of Dinah and Shechem (Genesis 34),” Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 119 (2007) 2-21 (available through NYU library).
Jack Sasson, From the Mari Archives: An Archival Mosaic of an Old Babylonian Culture (forthcoming, with appreciation to the author), Chapter 3, “War.”

16. (OCTOBER 31) MARRIAGE
EVIDENCE: the marriage contract in the Kathleen Abraham article; the book of Ruth
READING:
Sasson, From the Mari Archives, Chapter 1.8, “Marriage of Mari Princesses.”

17. (NOVEMBER 5) MAKING A LIVING
EVIDENCE: Gezer calendar (see King and Stager, p.88)
READING:
Oded Borowski, Agriculture in Iron Age Israel (Winona Lake, Ind. 1987), Chapter 4 section on the Gezer text.
E. LIFE EXPERIENCE

18. (NOVEMBER 7) WRITING
READING:

19. (NOVEMBER 12) ENTERTAINMENT
EVIDENCE: Esther; a Hittite ritual text (KUB XVII 35 Column III)
READING:
Charles Carter, “Hittite Cult-Inventories,” University of Chicago Ph.D. 1962, 142-44.

20. (NOVEMBER 14) EATING
EVIDENCE: See Magness
READING:

(MONDAY, NOVEMBER 19, NO CLASS: SOCIETY OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE ANNUAL MEETING — WORK ON YOUR PAPERS!)

(WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 21, DAY BEFORE THANKSGIVING: NYU RECESS, NO CLASS)

21. (NOVEMBER 26) EMOTION
EVIDENCE: (biblical text on human anger); a letter from Mari (A.1146)
READING:
Deena Grant on anger

**F. THE POWERS BEYOND**

22. **(NOVEMBER 28) MONOTHEISM AND POLYTHEISM**

EVIDENCE: Deuteronomy 32:8-9 (and the whole poem); Prayer to Any God (Foster, *Before the Muses* [Bethesda, Md. 1996] 2.670-72).

READING:


23. **(DECEMBER 3) YAHWEH**

EVIDENCE: Judges 5 (The Song of Deborah); the geographical lists of pharaohs Amenhotep III and Ramesses II (to be provided with NYU Classes)

READING:


24. **(DECEMBER 5) FORMS OF THE DIVINE: << SECOND PAPER DUE >>**

EVIDENCE: Genesis 18:1-15; the temple at Ain Dara (look at Google images under “Ain Dara”)

READING:


25. **(DECEMBER 10) SICKNESS AND HEALING**

EVIDENCE: 1 Samuel 1

READING:


**DECEMBER 12: SECOND IN-CLASS EXAM**