Instructor
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Course description

The Bible calls him the most humble of all men, yet depicts him as violently irascible. Philo saw him as the perfect embodiment of the Platonic ideal of the philosopher-king, while Josephus appreciated his cunning and prowess. Eusebius hailed Constantine as Moses-like in life and office, while Gregory of Nyssa saw Moses as perpetually striving to grasp elusive divinity. Prophet Muhammad emulated none of the biblical prophets more than Moses, who combined the qualities of a ruler with those of a lawgiver. Moses, it seems, was a little bit of everything to everyone. Then a seismic shift in our approach to knowledge, the European Enlightenment, dramatically undermined the authority of all tradition and diminished the towering figure of Moses: an 18th-century pamphlet ranks him, along with Jesus and Muhammad, among the “three impostors;” Spinoza dismissed the idea that Moses, or any prophet, possessed superior knowledge; modern scholars denied the Mosaic authorship of the Torah, and contemporary historians doubt whether we can ever know anything reliable about the historical Moses.

In this course we will trace the remarkable career of Moses from prophet to impostor tofigment of literary imagination; we will reflect on our own, perhaps conflicted, responses to this deconstruction; and we will ask ourselves why an epistemologically and historically discredited biblical narrative has continued to fascinate and engender ever-new creative and often contradictory readings and retellings, ranging from the moralism of Cecile B. Demilles' Ten Commandments to the ambivalent affirmation of the Mosaic desire to impose humanity on the unyielding bestiality of man, as depicted by Thomas Mann.

Scope, pacing, and narrative arc of the course

The course is largely an engagement with literature that ranges, in historical terms, from ancient to modern and from the Torah (an Ancient Near Eastern, biblical code of law) to modern critical works and dramatizations of the Moses sujet. The syllabus merely provides the order in which we read the early material, not the time we will spend on it, or only an approximation, since our pacing depends very much on the classroom discussion. We don’t want to be rushed but spend time with the texts to
make sure we have a good sense of what is going on. The order of exposition is most likely chronological. We begin with the most ancient text and proceed through late antiquity to medieval art and the modern reception(s) of, and engagements with, the figure of Moses.

Goals
This is a college level humanities course that introduces students to methods we use in the humanities, where we engage with readings ranging across history, literature, religion, theology, philosophy, and art. We practice the art of close reading, develop questions, engage in comparison, and raise hermeneutic questions of interpretation and sociological questions of authority. Goals include the honing of reading, writing, argumentation, and oral presentation skills. The course is broadly educational for students interested in western civilization, religion, art history, and political theory.

Assignments and grading
Students will keep a reading journal that I collect weekly and return with comments. This will allow me to see how you read and whether you are developing your reading and communication skills. The journal enters into your overall participation grade, which constitutes half of your course grade. Your preparation and participation are crucial since this is a text/discussion based course. The participation grade will also reflect any short writing assignments or presentations I may ask you to undertake. All this will count for 50% of your grade.

In-class presentation: You will be asked to take responsibility for a major topic or text and prepare a substantive presentation that will guide the class in the discussion. (25%)

The other 25% you will earn by producing a substantive term paper of 15 to 20 pages in length or an appropriate work of art, accompanied by a substantive theoretical reflection. (Details will be discussed in class.)

Academic Conduct

All students are required to adhere to the Boston University Academic Conduct code which can be found at http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/

Course readings
Most course readings will be made available in pdf on Blackboard8. I recommend the following books for purchase.

Adele Berlin et al., The Jewish Study Bible Featuring the Jewish Publication Society Tanakh Translation (OUP) ISBN 9780195297546

Xenophon - Education of Cyrus, Transl. Wayne Ambler (Cup Serv), ISBN 9780801487507

Philo - Philo, Vol. VI, 35 (Triliteral), ISBN 9780674993198

Eusebius - Life of Constantine, 99 (Oxf), ISBN 9780198149248

Brian Britt, Rewriting Moses: The Narrative Eclipse of the Text (Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005) paperback ISBN 9780567092052

Freud - Moses+Monotheism, 39 (Random), ISBN 9780394700144

Hurston - Moses, Man of Mountain, 09 (Harp Pub), ISBN 9780061695148

Thomas Mann, The Tables of the Law (out of print; available as pdf on courseinfo and multiple copies in library)

Malherbe - Gregory of Nyssa: Life of Moses, 78 (Paulist), ISBN 9780809121120

Mellinkoff - Horned Moses in Medieval Art + Thought, 97 (Wipf+Stock), ISBN 9781579100889


Schedule of topics and readings (tentative)

Week One Introduction: The Moses of the Torah
Th Sept 6

Week Two The Moses of Exodus
T Sept 11 Exodus 1-15
Th Sept 13 Exodus 16-40

Week Three Xenophon’s Cyrus
T Sept 18 Xenophon, The Education of Cyrus
Th Sept 20 Xenophon, The Education of Cyrus

Week Four Philo’s Moses
T Sept 25 Philo, The Life of Moses, Part I
Week Five The Moses of Josephus
T Oct 2 Josephus, *Antiquities*
Th Oct 4 Josephus, *Antiquities*

Week Six An Egyptian Moses: Manetho's story of Osarsiph
T Oct 9 (BU Monday/Simhat Torah)
Th Oct 11 Josephus, *Contra Apion*

Week Seven
T Oct 16 Moses in rabbinic Midrash (Ginzberg, Legends of the Jews)
Th Oct 18 Introduction to Moses in Late Antiquity

Week Eight Moses in Late Antiquity
T Oct 23
Th Oct 25
(No scheduled meetings; MZ in Hamilton Ont.)
Task: The class meets independently to work on a joint presentation on Moses in late antiquity, covering, among others, material from Gager, *Moses in Greco-Roman Paganism* (on blackboard), Eusebius' *Life of Constantine*, Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, and Wheeler on Moses in the Qur'an (on blackboard).

Week Nine
T Oct 30 In-class presentations
Th Oct 1 Moses in medieval art (read: Mellinkoff)

Week Ten Early modern Moses and the discourse on Moses and Egypt
T Nov 6 Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*
Th Nov 8 Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*

Week Eleven Moses in Modern Biblical Studies
T Nov 13 Brian Britt, *Rewriting Moses: The Narrative Eclipse of the Text*
Th Nov 15 Brian Britt, *Rewriting Moses: The Narrative Eclipse of the Text*

Week Twelve Freud's Moses
T Nov 20 Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*

Thanksgiving recess

Week Thirteen Moses in America
T Nov 27 Wright, Melanie – Moses in America. The Cultural Uses of Biblical Narrative
Th Nov 29 Wright, Melanie – Moses in America. The Cultural Uses of Biblical Narrative
Week Fourteen Moses Fiction
T Dec 4 Thomas Mann, *The Tables of the Law*
T Dec 6 Hurston, *Moses, Man of the Mountain*

Week Fifteen
T Dec 11 Discussion of research/term papers