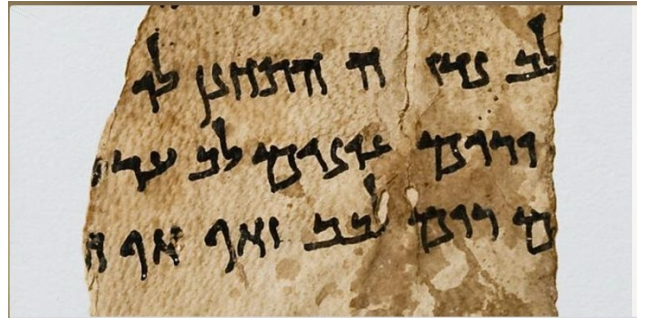


Jewish Scripts Throughout History

A Six Week Online Course
(August 24th-September 28th)

Taught by Joey Cross, PhD Candidate,
Hebrew Bible & Egyptology



Course Description

The Hebrew alphabet is iconically bound up with Judaism, but is nevertheless only one of many Jewish scripts. This class will survey these scripts used in the Middle East, Africa, and Europe until the appearance of printed Hebrew books in the 15th century, beginning with ancient Israel. Along the way, we will study how Jewish scripts are adapted for different situations, and what script choice says about culture. We will also study parallel traditions of writing in Samaritanism. Students will have the chance to practice calligraphy and to engage in experiential learning to bring the work of the scribe and the mechanics of handwriting to life. No previous experience or knowledge of Hebrew required!

Course Format

This class is organized thematically; see Course Schedule below. There are three components to the class:

1. **Video lectures.** At the beginning of each week (by 9 am Monday), several video lectures treating the week's topic will be posted on Canvas. These will run at least an hour in total.

2. **Digital resources.**

- *PDF readings and links shared on Canvas.* For each week, selected reading material will be shared on Canvas that will touch on the material covered in the lectures. All PDFs can be downloaded and saved for your future use.
- *Objects from the Oriental Institute Museum.* We will survey all relevant material held by the Oriental Institute for the study of Jewish scripts, focusing on manuscripts and other objects that have been published and that are available in photographic form. For each object, I will share images, IDB links, articles, and info for further reading as much as possible.

3. Student activities.

- Each week, there will be a different (optional) hands-on activity posted to Canvas. We will discuss them during the Thursday Zoom meetings (see below).

4. **Class interaction.** Starting Thursday, August 27th, and again each Thursday during the class, we will have the opportunity to engage in live discussion on Zoom from 6-7 pm (Central Time). These sessions will give students a chance to share any work they have done, and will also be a time for questions and general discussion.

Course Schedule

Week 1: Graphology, or How to Study Writing

Lectures:

- Introduction to the class and survey of resources and tools
- Introduction to graphology (the study of writing)
- Overview of writing materials and technologies encountered (ink, pens, paper, etc.)

Activities:

- Learning the Hebrew script and transcribing it into Latin characters
- Taking a close look at your own handwriting
- Practicing how to write Hebrew (demonstration on Zoom)

Week 2: The Paleo-Hebrew Script

Lectures:

- A manuscript-focused introduction to the Ancient Israelites and the Hebrew Bible
- The invention of the West Semitic *abjad* and the origin of the paleo-Hebrew script
- Overview of Iron Age Hebrew texts and inscriptions

Activity:

- Creating a paleography of the paleo-Hebrew script
- Analyzing your own handwriting

Week 3: Hebrew and Aramaic in The Second Temple Period

Lectures:

- From paleo-Hebrew to square script
- Judean scripts in the diaspora
- Was Demotic Egyptian a Judean script?
- The scripts of the Dead Sea Scrolls

Activity:

- Dating Dead Sea Scrolls based on handwriting

Week 4: A Biblical-Focused Survey of Hebrew Scripts in Late Antique and Medieval Judaism

Lectures:

- Overview of regional scripts and developments
- How to read and interpret a Masoretic Bible
- The Cairo Geniza

Activity:

- Medieval manuscript scavenger hunt

Week 5: Beyond the Hebrew Language

Lectures:

- Judaeo-Greek
- Judaeo-Arabic
- Judaeo-Persian
- Ladino (Judaeo-Spanish)

Activity:

- Experiment: transcribing a text into a different script

Week 6: The Samaritan Script; Virtual Gallery Tour

Lectures:

- The first printed Hebrew books
- Who are the Samaritans?
- The Samaritan script through history
- Jewish scripts at the Oriental Institute and the University of Chicago (virtual gallery tour)

List of objects:

- [OIM C2](#) – Cast of the Mesha Stele
- [OIM A30303](#) – Fragment of a Dead Sea scroll of the “Wiles of the Wicked Woman”
- [OIM A7357](#) – Stamp seal containing Jeremiah 48:11
- [OIM A4A-B](#) – Stone ossuary with Hebrew inscription (Roman)
- [OIM A16082](#) – Hasmonean coin with Hebrew inscription(?) on reverse, from Megiddo
- [OIM A7379](#) – Circular amulet, perhaps from Iran
- [OIM A25613](#), [A17877](#), [A455](#), [A17874](#), [A33963](#), [A33965](#), [A32675](#) – Aramaic incantation bowls from Iraq (Sassanian and Early Islamic periods)
- [OIM A11241](#) – One leaf from a Masoretic codex of the Hebrew Bible, containing a mix of Babylonian and Tiberian vocalization (Cairo Geniza)
- [OIM A11242](#) and [A11243](#) – Two bifolia from a Masoretic codex of the Hebrew Bible (Cairo Geniza)
- [OIM A11244](#) and [A11245](#) – Two leaves from a Masoretic codex of the Hebrew Bible (Cairo Geniza)
- [OIM A11246](#) – Two leaves from a codex with an Arabic translation of Joshua in Hebrew script (Cairo Geniza)
- [OIM A11247](#) – Judaeo-Arabic writing exercise
- [OIM A12062](#) – 57 folios from a codex with an Arabic commentary by Yafath ibn ‘Ali, written in Hebrew and Arabic
- [University of Chicago, Regenstein Library MS no. 495](#) – Section of a Torah scroll containing Deuteronomy 3:14-8:20
- [OIM A9B](#) - Three leaves from a codex of the Samaritan Pentateuch (Leviticus)
- [OIM A6957](#) – Two leaves from a trilingual codex of the Samaritan Pentateuch (Genesis), from British Museum MS Or. 7562
- Others TBA