Hebrew Myths and Jewish Legends

Like any human society, Jewish culture has its own myths and legends; however, several “anomalies”—social, geographic, and temporal—contributed to the unique development of its myths and legends. These have yet to be examined in a comprehensive and interdisciplinary study, and have ramifications for the theoretical questions framing the research on myths in general. From a social point of view, the customs of Jewish society—some as ancient as the prohibition on worshiping a multiplicity of divinities; others later, such as the prohibition on describing God in anthropomorphic terms—have produced various creative solutions. Geographically, the Jewish diaspora and the periodic transition of Jewish centers both led to a unique arrangement of myths and legends from very different locales and based on diverse influences. In terms of time span, the large textual corpus, which extends overs a very long period, enables us to follow the development of its ideas and their evolution. Within this framework, we wish to bring together scholars from various disciplines, who deal with literary texts from different periods, in order to investigate Jewish myths and legends in the context of their time and environment, and especially emphasizing the interconnection between the Jewish myths and legends and the literatures of neighboring non-Jewish communities. Our topic stretches from the biblical texts that were written alongside the great cultures of the ancient Near East, through the Second Temple and Rabbinic literatures developed in conversation with the Greco-Roman and Babylonian centers, the Jewish folklore of the Middle Ages under the hegemony of the Muslim and Christian worlds, and up to modern times and the contemporary world.