

**The 50th Anniversary Issue:  
New Vistas in Jewish Studies**

FALL 2018

**FORUM:**  
Five Decades of New Vistas

AJS

**PERSPECTIVES**

THE MAGAZINE OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR JEWISH STUDIES



# The 50th Anniversary Issue: New Vistas in Jewish Studies

FALL 2018



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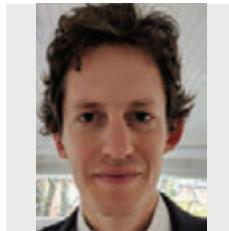
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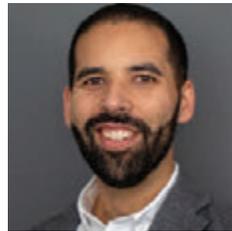
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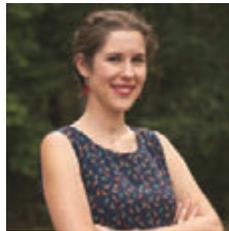
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# From the Editor(s)

## Dear Colleagues,

This issue occupies a liminal space: like the Roman god Janus, it turns its gaze simultaneously to the past and the future. It looks back at the history of our association, surveying its five decades of robust experimentation and energetic growth; and it anticipates some of what may lie ahead in the decades to come. In conceiving of this issue, Jonathan Hess (ה"ר) and I strove to embrace the AJS's rich half century of history without succumbing to nostalgia. Our ambition was to capture in print the intellectual vibrancy that propelled, and will continue to propel, the Association for Jewish Studies from its founding moments to today.

By design, this issue is emphatically not a retrospective. Jonathan and I entitled this issue "New Vistas in Jewish Studies" precisely because we shared an excitement about where Jewish Studies is going. We recognized that Jewish Studies does not exist apart from those writers and thinkers who constitute the field, and so the longer essays in this issue highlight the diversity of scholars and scholarship energizing Jewish Studies at the present moment. The authors are academics and public intellectuals, all of whom are relative newcomers to the field. Many of these voices understand themselves to be, in some fashion, at the margins of Jewish Studies—or, as Jonathan and I thought of them, at leading edges. Each author received her or his PhD within the last decade (since the AJS's fortieth anniversary), but while all

are in Jewish Studies, not all have chosen traditional academic careers. In their personal and professional diversity, they also speak to the development of our field since 1968. Contributors were asked to reflect on their pathway into Jewish Studies, to consider the current state of the field, and to lay out an agenda for where they hoped it might move. The voices, stories, topics, and sources given space here display the amazing mosaic of emergent Jewish Studies, even as they also make clear that Jewish Studies still has a lot of work to do. Within the span of Jewish history, fifty years is a blink; and if "fifty is the new twenty," surely our field still young and vigorous, occasionally awkward and gangly, sometimes robustly self-confident and sometimes deeply self-interrogating. Such scholarly self-consciousness is no doubt for the best.

While the Forum section, entitled "Fifty Years of New Vistas," tacks more explicitly to the past, we also wanted to capture the forward momentum of the field, albeit from a historical angle. As with the essays, these pieces are self-reflective, but they offer the voices of scholars who were, at different AJS anniversaries, themselves the future of Jewish Studies. We asked scholars who were themselves at the very beginnings of their careers—graduate students or new faculty—when they were just getting to know the AJS and the field of Jewish Studies. We supplied them with conference programs from years past as *aides-mémoire*, and



Laura S. Lieber

asked them to imagine themselves back at that moment. What, we asked, was exciting or energizing then—intellectually or professionally? How have these avenues of inquiry or activism unfolded over time since? In short, what were the “new vistas” in their formative decades, and what can we appreciate about those moments now, from where we presently are?

This issue of *AJS Perspectives* is rich with more personal memories, as well. It is the last issue reflecting the mind, spirit, and insightfulness of my coeditor before his untimely death in April 2018. Jonathan’s fingerprints linger on these pages, as does his intellectual imprint: in his mentorship, as noted in essays by colleagues and students with whom he worked; in the breadth and scope of the scholars represented in its pages, whose voices he championed; and in the way the entire issue was conceived and framed. Our coeditorship was a delightful partnership, complementary and reciprocal at every level. In the weeks after his death, I had to accept that while I could see the issues on which he and I had worked together through to completion—with his cheerful, subversive voice in my ear and, in the form of “track changes,” sometimes before my eyes—I could not imagine going forward alone or with an interim coeditor. And so, with the support of the AJS leadership, including Christine Hayes, Warren Hoffman, and Robin Judd, and in close collaboration with managing editor Karin Kugel, we put out

a call for a new team of coeditors. This method of choosing coeditors was itself new, and reflects the increasing openness of our organization. We received a gratifying number of strong applications, and are pleased to announce that the new editors will be Chaya Halberstam (King’s University College at Western University) and Mira Sucharov (Carleton University), our first Canada-based editorial team.

I take comfort in my confidence that Jonathan would be delighted with this issue—with its kaleidoscope of voices, visions, and (yes) perspectives—and that he would be thrilled by our successors. I know that Jonathan shared my pride in this publication, and in the ways that the AJS is continuing to push all of us to work and think and interact. As the AJS turns fifty, I realize how young that is—just a little older than me, and a little younger than Jonathan. I will always remain grateful for my three and a half years as coeditor of this publication, and I know the magazine—like the organization of which it is a part—will go from strength to strength.

With all anticipation for the future, and in gratitude for the gifts of the past,

Laura S. Lieber  
*Duke University*

# From the President

## Dear Colleagues,

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson taught us that metaphors shape both our perceptions and our actions, and that they generally do so without our notice. But Lakoff and Johnson also taught us that we can become conscious of the metaphors we live by and the way they condition us to think and act. The point is crucial because with self-awareness comes a degree of agency. One can choose to perceive of argument as a war, and act accordingly—addressing one’s interlocuter as an enemy, hunkering down behind defensive walls or attacking weak points until a decisive victory is won and the enemy is vanquished. Or one can choose to perceive of argument as a construction project, and act accordingly—addressing one’s interlocuter as a member of the work crew, contributing raw materials and skilled labor until the common project of building something new—something that could not have been built by any single individual—is achieved.

What metaphors do we use and what metaphors might we choose to shape our perceptions of Jewish Studies and our actions as Jewish Studies scholars and professionals? The essays included in the 50th Anniversary Issue of *AJS Perspectives* are sprinkled with metaphors that can shape both our perceptions of Jewish Studies and the actions we undertake to propel the field towards new vistas.

Many of the essays in this issue explicitly or implicitly invoke the metaphor of the edge, which carries with it a slew of associated terms and concepts. There is, of course, the cutting edge and more than one essayist expresses the wish that Jewish Studies scholarship aspire to occupy that precise location. But an edge is also a margin, another metaphor rich with associations. For as much as edges and margins are decentered places of vulnerability, they are also zones of regeneration: as Chris Silver reminds us, every outpost on the margin has the potential to emerge as a new center that radically redraws our map of the possible.

Edges and margins are also central to the formation and maintenance of canons—those bounded collections of knowledge that can both foster and constrict our scholarly pursuits. Several of the essays in this issue point to the limitations of the bounded domains generated by our canonical edges and margins. For many of our authors, the most exciting and original work is done beyond these boundaries, outside the edges, or in between the margins.

Beyond, outside, in between—these terms recur in the essays collected here and suggest that Jewish Studies is, in the words of Saul Noam Zaritt, a strategy of refusal that does not seek an imagined home in traditional boundaries and binaries but remains elsewhere, “approaching an unknowable space.”



Christine Hayes

Edges are also implicated in permeability and interdisciplinarity. Margins are, after all, the very condition for those moments of intellectual exchange that sustain and revitalize our community. Without margins, our capacity for interaction is invisible even to ourselves. Indeed, if there is a common theme to the essays written by our younger scholars, it is, perhaps, the yearning that our capacity for intellectual interaction, and the creative realignments it can engender, be recognized, leveraged, and celebrated.

In one respect, this yearning points us not only towards the future but back to the past. As senior scholars note in the Forum section of this issue, the push for Jewish Studies scholars to acquire masteries beyond the edges of their own scholarly preoccupations and the ability of AJS members to attend conference sessions beyond the boundaries of their canonical subfield was not merely a practical reality in the early days of the AJS; it was an explicit ideal. Marsha Rozenblit is surely not alone in the wistful observation that the very success of Jewish Studies has led to a new reality that works against this ideal.

But there is no action without a reaction. The excessive siloing of knowledge—not only in Jewish Studies but in the contemporary academy as a whole—has inspired new modes of scholarly resistance that establish outposts beyond the margins, that in turn become vibrant centers for the production of new knowledge. The AJS has

worked to keep pace with this development in recent years, creating a conference division for Interdisciplinary Studies as well as a Wild Card division where members can propose thematic sessions, such as the wonderfully successful “Jews and Politics,” that organize knowledge in new ways. Rethinking our divisions and the way we submit conference proposals will be a topic of conversation in several 50 and Forward panels at the 2018 conference. I hope you will join that conversation.

That is not my only hope. As you read this issue and as you experience this conference and its theme of 50 and Forward, I hope you will reflect on the metaphors we live and work by as Jewish Studies scholars and professionals. I hope you will consider whether those metaphors constrain you or liberate you; and if they do not liberate you, then I hope you will join in the shared search for metaphors that will enable this extraordinary and vibrant community to redraw its map of the possible.

Christine Hayes  
*Yale University*

# From the Executive Director

“We’re 50!”

One of my favorite *Saturday Night Live* characters is Sally O’Malley, who, played by the inimitable Molly Shannon, loves to state that she’s “50 years old” and likes to “kick, stretch, and kick!” We don’t do a lot of kicking or physical stretching here at the Association for Jewish Studies, but as we celebrate our own 50th anniversary starting in January, we are, like Sally O’Malley, feisty, energetic, and yes, proud of our age and experience.

The AJS has come a long way since its first meeting of scholars in Boston back in December 1968; it has not only grown larger with members across the globe and more sophisticated in its operations as a nonprofit, but also more diverse in its leadership and areas of scholarship as well as wide reaching and impactful in terms of membership engagement and service. For many Jewish Studies academics, we are their primary scholarly home, a place for academic resources as well as social and intellectual community.

At the same time, like the red-jumpsuit-wearing, bouffant-haired O’Malley (I’d like to think we have more style), we’re not sitting on our laurels, unafraid to tackle new challenges. The tagline for this year is “50 and Forward,” which firmly announces that we are looking squarely toward the future, toward change that is being driven both by our members as well as by the academic landscape itself. As the AJS matures as an institution, the

organization is no longer content serving just its members; we want to share our members’ work with the wider public. Starting in late 2018, we’ll be doing precisely that with a new public-facing narrative podcast series that will highlight our members’ fascinating research. We can’t wait to share your work with the world as we take listeners on fascinating and compelling journeys.

We’re also launching a new arts and culture community grants program that will fund joint projects between Jewish Studies programs and local community organizations. Applications for that program open in January. We’re expanding our Distinguished Lectureship Program through a generous grant made possible by funding from Jordan Schnitzer and Arlene Schnitzer through the Harold & Arlene Schnitzer Family Fund of the Oregon Jewish Community Foundation that provides new hosting institutions with up to \$750 in subsidy to bring a speaker to their community. Visit [associationforjewishstudies.org](http://associationforjewishstudies.org) for more information about how you can bring one of our speakers to you. Finally, because of new money from the Foundation for Jewish Culture, the AJS will be supporting a variety of new research and dissertation awards in the coming years, starting with some new publication subvention grants this year.

While engaging the public has been a major goal of the AJS leadership in the last few years, we are, of course, at our core, a membership organization,



Warren Hoffman

devoted to serving our members and improving their professional careers. From our new task forces, which are working to make sure that our organization is a safe, inclusive, and welcoming space, to revamping our conference fee schedule to make the conference as financially accessible to as many individuals as possible, to creating new opportunities for professional development, the AJS can only remain a vibrant, thriving, and relevant organization if it continues to evolve. This fall, the AJS surveyed both Jewish Studies departments across North America as well as its own membership (past and current) to better grasp the trends and issues facing our members and institutions. We will be using this data to ascertain what steps the organization needs to take in the coming months and years to serve our constituents, and we look forward to sharing the results of the studies with all of you.

This is a great time to be at the Association for Jewish Studies. There's not only so much history to celebrate and be proud of, but so much to look forward to as well. As we turn 50, I hope we celebrate like Sally O'Malley: kicking into the future, stretching ourselves in new and rewarding ways, and remaining fiercely proud of our organization's history, legacy, and achievements.

Warren Hoffman  
*Association for Jewish Studies*

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In time for our 50th anniversary, the AJS is excited to announce the new AJS Legacy Society, a planned giving initiative, and we invite members and supporters to include a gift to the AJS in their estate plans.

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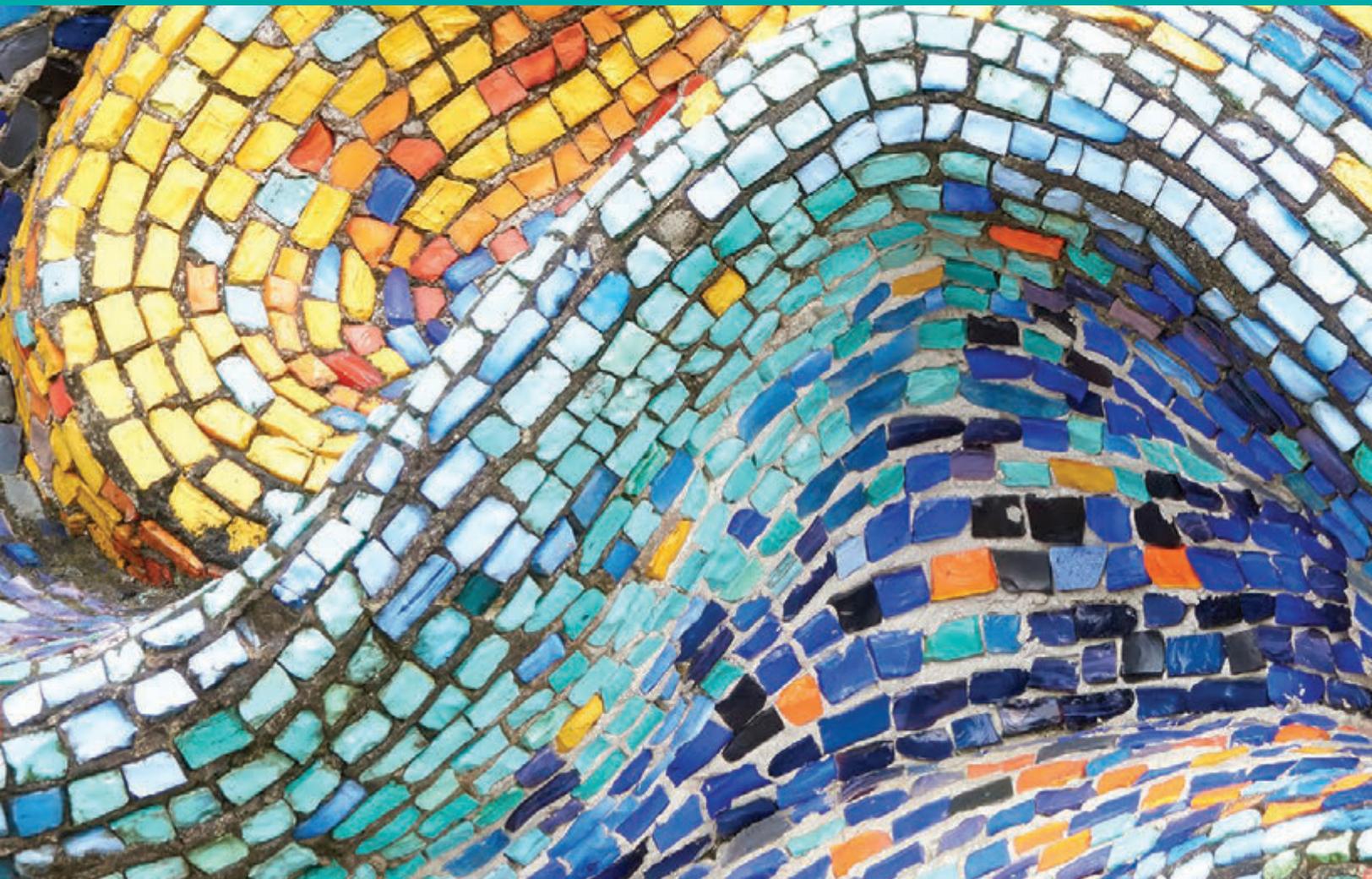
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# Blurring Boundaries

What is “Jewish Studies”? What is *not* Jewish Studies? The essays in this section push at some of the conceptual borders defining our field, in an effort to discern where the limits are and what it means to transgress them. Some of the boundaries these writers encountered reflect the persistence of disciplinary conventions, others emerge from broader academic dynamics, and still others exist primarily in the narratives individuals construct for themselves. All the authors share a conviction that the boundaries of Jewish Studies are permeable, fluid, and hardly limiting of intellectual inquiry and creativity.



# Torah Study, Jewishly

Rebecca Scharbach  
Wollenberg

As a field, Jewish Studies has a problem with the Bible. On the face of things, this would seem to be untrue. After all, the Bible and the History of Biblical Interpretation is a long-standing section at the Association for Jewish Studies annual meeting. Several major Judaic Studies centers have recently made hires in either Hebrew Bible or the history of Jewish biblical exegesis. And new monographs appear in the field of Jewish Studies every year characterizing Jews as the "People of the Book."

Yet, most scholars of Biblical Studies will attest that they encounter a certain level of ambivalence toward their presence at the AJS. In my own experience, for instance, it is strangely difficult to get anyone at the AJS to acknowledge that I work on Biblical Studies. According to my job description, I study the "history of Jewish biblical interpretation." My Jewish Studies colleagues, however, consistently introduce me as a "scholar of Rabbinics." If I object to this characterization, an argument inevitably ensues. Not long ago, I found myself disagreeing with a perfect stranger about what I work on. "Ah, yes, you're the new Rabbinics person at the Frankel Center," he says. "Uhm, well ... actually I mostly work on the history of biblical interpretation," I insist, assuming he has confused me with someone else. "You mean you focus more on *'aggadata* (nonlegal talmudic material)." "I'd say I teach *parshanut* (exegesis)." "But your talk was so good ... let's call it *midrash* (rabbinic homiletics)." And with that apparent non sequitur, we have agreed to compromise on my field of study.

It took me a little while to understand that these exchanges had very little to do with the content of my work and a great deal to do with status of the Bible in the field of Jewish Studies. To say someone "does Rabbinics" is to identify them as an insider, to accept them without reservation into the heart of the Jewish Studies fold. To say "I teach Bible" is taken as a statement of modesty meant to minimize one's claim to expertise in the field, or even as a form of standoffishness. On paper, the Bible belongs in the AJS. In practice, we are ambivalent.

This ambivalence towards the status of Bible in Jewish Studies has been explained to me in various ways. "Bible is women's work," one colleague explained to me. And certainly, in many Jewish communities



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in the last hundred and fifty years, this was often true. Even in contemporary academic research, an expert on medieval Jewish exegesis can write an entire monograph chapter that quotes only female scholars (see, for instance, Devorah Schoenfeld, “Rashi and His Sources” in *Isaac on Jewish and Christian Altars* [Fordham, 2013]).

“Bible is a Protestant invention,” another colleague quipped. Again, there is a great deal of truth to the observation that the current iteration of Biblical Studies is a field constructed around the intellectual concerns of early modern Christian thinkers.

But my own area of research suggests that the ambivalence towards the study of Bible among many Jewish Studies scholars may have deeper historical roots than either of these phenomena. At least since the rise of a second biblical religion in Christianity, rabbinic Judaism has cultivated two distinct forms of the biblical tradition. One is a Bible not wholly unlike the modern scholarly Bible—a fixed and linear written text that acquires commentaries that are marked as separate from itself. This is the Bible we glimpse in early rabbinic descriptions of Jewish-Christian disputation, in the medieval *peshat* (contextual meaning) commentaries, and in the forms of the biblical text embraced by many early modern Jewish reformers. Let us call this the Written Bible.

The other Jewish Bible is something entirely different. It is a version of the biblical tradition that lives in the memories and imaginations of practitioners—an uneven anthology of all the memorized biblical verses and sacred narratives that form a practitioner’s functional biblical archive. Where the Written Bible is a closed and discrete text, this Remembered Bible is exegetically open. In this biblical tradition, outside scraps of narrative and ethical musings accrete to the remembered formulas, sections of the work that are quite distant in the written text are drawn together in the memory by a similarity of phrasing, and both the meaning and tenor of the message are colored by the intimacy of being preserved by a living subject. This is the Bible of early rabbinic midrash, the Talmuds, Maimonides’s *Guide of the Perplexed*, and the stories that our students quote us from *Little Midrash Says*. Let us call this the Remembered Bible.

**It took me a little while to understand that these exchanges had very little to do with the content of my work and a great deal to do with status of the Bible in the field of Jewish Studies.**

More importantly for our purposes, perhaps, these two Jewish Bibles have often been deployed in a historical form of communal code-switching. Inward-facing Jewish works and genres seem to engage more often with the fragmented intimacy of the Remembered Bible. In that personal, inexactly remembered, and constantly moving transcript, rabbinic thinkers have frequently found a form of the biblical tradition that is open to the level of reworking necessary to leverage the cultural power of the Bible in a way that can effectively address the changing social realities of new generations of Jewish practitioners as they cross centuries and continents.

In periods of outward-facing religious creativity—such as the era of competitive global scripturalism that defined the turn of the millennium after the rise of Islam—rabbinic Jewry has more often turned to the Written Bible as a recognized form of prestige literature that hypostasizes Jewish religious culture in a way that is both literally and metaphorically legible to others.

I would suggest that this long history of biblical code-switching has subtly imbued those who study it with a distrust of the Written Bible as an honored witness to a sacred tradition that is simultaneously not quite of the family—a pale reflection of higher truths that are somehow captured more authentically in the living tradition of the Remembered Bible.

If I am correct in this observation, the question remains of what to do with these historical instincts. For myself, I would like to see Jewish Studies embrace its own internal vision of the biblical tradition more robustly. In too many ways, we have quietly ceded the Bible to a scholarly method that is subtly out of step with the emic modes of our own subjects of study. We have recategorized classical rabbinic modes of engagement with the biblical tradition as “Rabbinics” and silently held the field of Biblical Studies at arm’s length. In doing so, I believe we have left both Jewish Studies and Biblical Studies poorer.

Instead, I would advocate for the cultivation of new forms of humanistic Biblical Studies that draw on historical Jewish approaches to the biblical tradition. To do so would enrich Jewish Studies by giving it a scholarly Bible that is more in line with the way the biblical tradition is engaged in so many of the historical source materials with which we work. To do so would enrich Biblical Studies by introducing a more multifaceted scholarly method that draws on a broader diversity of intellectual traditions. And given the demographics of Bible reading

across the globe, Jewish Studies would make one of its most impactful contributions to the humanities to date if it transformed the scholarly vision of the Bible and its reception.

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*Braginsky Collection Scroll 113, detail, Esther and puppets on a string.  
Braginsky Collection, Zurich. Photography by Ardon Bar-Hama, Ra'anana, Israel.*

# Can Paul Come to the AJS?

Jill Hicks-Keeton

Along with delight at having been invited to reflect on the field of Jewish Studies and my involvement in it, I feel some unease writing this essay. And yet I think—I hope—that it’s a productive discomfort. I am a (non-Jewish) scholar officially trained in a New Testament PhD track, who along the way became convinced that I was studying literature produced by ancient Jewish thinkers. I was doing Jewish Studies. Perhaps this conclusion will raise a few eyebrows, given that “New Testament” is a Christian theological category and that for two millennia many of its contents have been mobilized against Jews. If indeed that is the case, my hope is that the following observations will spark conversation about the limits of our constructed disciplines, which are always evolving and carry ethical urgency in addition to historical and analytical weight.

I entered the field quite by accident. I suspect mine is in broad strokes a familiar story to many—particularly for fellow Bible scholars who were, like I was, born and bred in a Christian world and then came to realize through engagement with modern biblical scholarship just how pernicious Christian thinking has been, and often continues to be, toward Judaism. These thought patterns, particularly in the division of the Bible into two testaments, continue to shape how biblical literature is studied even in the academy. Despite my official training, I work principally on literature from Second Temple Judaism, a trove of works that defy testamentary categorization or whose conscription into the Christian canon obscured until the last half century the fact that they were produced by ancient Jewish writers.

Having completed doctoral work in the Graduate Program in Religion at Duke University (PhD, 2014), I inherited the intellectual legacy of E. P. Sanders, whose work launched New Testament scholars into new discus-

**By now it is perhaps a familiar critique to point out that the literature of ancient Judaism has too often been colonized by modern biblical scholars, understood merely as an archive of “background” evidence for understanding the New Testament and early Christianity. But it still needs to be said.**

sions about what ancient Judaism was really like, wresting Second Temple Judaism from the sweaty palms of Christian theologians and cryptotheologians reading everything through a false dichotomy of grace versus works, Christianity versus Judaism. Sanders’s *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Fortress, 1977), so the quip goes, was as much if not more so a contribution to our understanding of ancient Judaism as it was to our understanding of Paul, the purported author of many of the texts considered part of the Christian New Testament. And the emphasis on the Jewishness of the New Testament reverberated throughout my training—despite Duke’s traditionally Protestant division of doctoral tracks into Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and New Testament.

By now it is perhaps a familiar critique to point out that the literature of ancient Judaism has too often been colonized by modern biblical scholars, understood merely as an archive of “background” evidence for understanding the New Testament and early Christianity. But it still needs to be said. My deep dive into the works problematically known as “Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha” led me ultimately to the conclusion that Sanders and his ilk did not go far enough. It’s not that we need to get ancient Judaism right so that we can understand Paul. Rather, Paul is useful to us as historians when we read him rightly as a first-century Jewish thinker because he provides but one example of what it could mean to be Jewish in antiquity. Treating Paul not as a “Christian” author but as a first-century Jew offers another window onto the diversity of ancient Judaism.

Indeed, many scholars are now mining the New Testament more generally for what light it can shed on our understanding of ancient Judaism, and the possibili-

ties of its pluriformity. I think particularly of Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Brettler's fantastic resource, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, now in its second edition (Oxford University Press, 2017). It's a methodological stance I implemented in my first book, *Arguing with Aseneth*, in which analysis of Paul's letters appears only insofar as it helps illuminate the ancient Jewish romance known as Joseph and Aseneth. In the book, I trace a wider debate in Second Temple Judaism about the boundaries of the people believed to have been chosen by Israel's God, a debate that blurs the lines between Christian and Jewish texts from this period. I approached this body of literature in this way because I think this methodology makes for good history.

Yet, in addition to caring about doing history well, I care about people being kind to each other—and the assignment of the New Testament documents to the Christian canon without recognizing their Jewish production has supported and even borne violence, rhetorical and physical. I remain deeply concerned about Christian supersessionism, particularly when it's rendered invisible by scholars' and lay persons' implicitly Christian patterns of thinking about history, within which Jewish people or traditions are often problematically figured. Curiosity and concern about contemporary institutionalized Christian anti-Judaism is what brought me to the AJS in the first place. For the 2017 annual meeting in Washington, DC, I organized and presented on a panel addressing how Jews, Judaism, and the Jewish Bible are represented at the controversial Museum of the Bible, opened last year near the National Mall and funded principally by evangelical Christian donors. One of the critiques I advanced was that Judaism became instrumentalized, due in part to the exhibits' silencing of first-century CE Jewish voices not affiliated with the historical movement that would later become Christianity.

For the sake of accuracy—not to mention ethics—we need to highlight the Jewish production of most of these earliest "Christian" materials. But, I think, even this does not go far enough. Historians of Judaism should look to the New Testament and other "Christian" sources from antiquity as material for writing Jewish history. To treat these texts as "Christian" and as Christian scriptures is to allow later Christian canonical and theological judgments to shape how we write history. New vistas in Jewish Studies emerge, then, when New Testament literature is no longer assigned to Christianity or to canon—when it is viewed as part of the diversity of ancient Judaism, during



*Marc Chagall, White Crucifixion. Oil on canvas, 60 7/8 in. x 55 1/16 in. France, 1938. Gift of Alfred S. Alschuler, Art Institute of Chicago, 1946.925. © 2018 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.*

a period of time when there was no concept of the Bible as moderns tend to think of it. Scholars working in Jewish Studies and who participate in the AJS recognize that Judaism has always been a series of complex negotiations of identity undertaken by a constantly evolving people. As such, one future for Jewish Studies is to reimagine Christian scriptures as Jewish texts that open up new ways of seeing how people affiliated with the God of Israel navigated the complex landscape of the ancient Mediterranean world.

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# A Palimpsest: On Judeo-Islamic and Israel-Palestine Studies

Mostafa Hussein

## Palimpsest

In her study *Intertwined World*, Hava Lazarus-Yafeh writes, “The Near East resembles a palimpsest, layer upon layer, tradition upon tradition, intertwined to the extent that one cannot really grasp one without the other, certainly not the later without the earlier, but often also not the earlier without considering the shapes it took later” (Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 4). Although Lazarus-Yafeh was writing about the religious traditions of the East in a manner transcending influence and cultural borrowing, I find this entanglement still true when it comes to the study of Jewish-Muslim relations in the modern Middle East, including the question of Jews and Arabs in Israel-Palestine. To better grasp the intertwined world of Jews and Muslims, or Jews and Arabs, there should be a place within Jewish Studies for interdisciplinary scholarship that combines Judeo-Islamic Studies with Israel-Palestine Studies. This is all the more urgent and feasible now, at a time when we are witnessing an increase of scholarly activities that treat subjects across Jewish and Islamic Studies as well as Israel-Palestine Studies.

## Graduate Studies

In the East and the West, in my graduate studies I sought answers to questions about mutual Jewish-Muslim perceptions and their relations in modern times. While exploring Jewish culture and history in the Islamic world, I realized that the answers I am seeking are to be found in an area of scholarship that inhabits the intersection between Jewish and Islamic Studies on the one hand and that of Israeli and Palestinian Studies on the other. My intellectual curiosity was intensified by Jewish engagement with Islam. My discovery of Hebrew translations of the Quran—four existed at the time—in addition to

Israeli Islamicists’ contributions motivated me to explore deeply and examine closely the politics of knowledge production. Refusing to surrender to the belief that scholarly interest in Islam was merely objective or an embodiment of a political agenda, I endeavored to question the degree to which Islamic culture might have played a role in the construction of Jewish culture in the formative period in Palestine prior to 1948.



*Haggadah shel Pesah (the Sister Haggadah). Barcelona, Spain, 1325-1374 CE. Or 2884. © The British Library Board.*

## Scholarship

By uncovering and articulating connections between Islamic knowledge and Jews in prestate Palestine, my scholarship provides a new perspective into the development of Jewish national culture in the context of the Islamic intellectual world of the modern Middle East. In its pursuit of understanding Jewish-Muslim relations, with an emphasis on the question of Israel-Palestine and its impact on shaping the mutual perception of Jews and Arabs in the Middle East, my approach moves Jewish Studies from being an academic field tethered to its insular origins, as Aaron Hughes points out in his critical assessment of the field, to becoming a more open field of study. Approached from this perspective, the study of Jewish subjects is enriched through engagement with Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies. My own research furthers this agenda by focusing on Jewish intellectuals' engagement with Arabo-Islamic texts relevant to ideas such as the land, nature, Arabic literature, and Islamic religious culture in building the Jewish nationalist project. I examine the place of such knowledge in the processes of constructing the identity of the "new Jew," and such a figure's connection to the Hebrew Bible and to a sense of belonging to the land, and relationship with the Islamic Orient. Jews could not familiarize themselves with the landscape of Palestine without confronting Arabo-Islamic culture's centuries of knowledge about the land. My study, therefore, presents both a new understanding of the history of early Jewish intellectual activities in Israel-Palestine and their contact with other intellectual elite in the surrounding Arab countries. Looking through this lens, we can revisit and enrich the history of the encounter between Jews and Islamic culture in the evolution of the Zionist movement.

## Looking Back

Undoubtedly, cross-disciplinary topics raise interesting questions that encourage conversation across humanities and social sciences. Promoting this conversation becomes an imperative when we consider how scholarship lies at the crossroads of Judeo-Islamic Studies and/or Israel-Palestine Studies. As much as the marriage between two academic fields stimulates the intellect and provokes erudition, it nonetheless also can create

**I realized that the answers I am seeking are to be found in an area of scholarship that inhabits the intersection between Jewish and Islamic Studies on the one hand and that of Israeli and Palestinian Studies on the other.**

barriers and obstacles, whether for the learned or their readership. How can the producers and the consumers of this type of interdisciplinary knowledge overcome the structural problems found in the individual fields? To name one example, at the seemingly simple level of nomenclature: Lena Salaymeh rightly points out that issues of periodization and historical frames of reference are insular shortcomings common to both Jewish and Islamic Studies. Similar concerns plague those who work in Israel-Palestine Studies. What labels does one use to encompass the dynamics of "Israel-Palestine"? How should a label change in accordance with the historical period? What do such choices reveal about the writer's assumptions? How better could one address interesting questions while simultaneously avoiding the situation in which some readers might resonate with the discussion while others might find it difficult and alienating?

## Future Directions

"The humanities" stand for a tradition of knowledge and aesthetic expression that is vested in a canon of works and ideas. As Julie Thompson Klein explains about the humanistic enterprise, "it invokes values of wisdom and normative qualities required for humane conduct, ethical decision-making, and civic responsibility" (*Humanities, Culture, and Interdisciplinarity: The Changing American Academy* [SUNY, 2005], 1) Situated within the humanities, Jewish Studies is expected to share some of these qualities and to evoke humanistic values by exploring questions not only relevant to a certain audience but also to a wider readership of humanities. This audience must include those interested in subjects of significance in Islamic Studies and Israel-Palestine Studies. Far more overtly fraught than issues of nomenclature, it almost goes without saying, are the tensions surrounding the question of Israel-Palestine. The religious relations between Judaism and Islam, as Aaron Hughes has noticed, are now imagined through the lens of the



**As tensions persist, new barriers and obstacles rise up to separate Jewish and Islamic Studies and to hinder the possibility of grasping adequately the complexities of the situation on both fronts.**

nation-state, as Israel and Palestine. As tensions persist, new barriers and obstacles rise up to separate Jewish and Islamic Studies and to hinder the possibility of grasping adequately the complexities of the situation on both fronts. Perhaps pointing out the disinterest of many scholars in studying Arabic and Hebrew nonsuperficially, as necessary tools to carry on research in Jewish and Islamic Studies as well as Israel-Palestine Studies, suffices to make this point. Instead, there should be a place for scholarship that not only raises questions pertaining to Jewish matters but also deeply engages in inquiries that resonate with Islamic Studies—especially when it comes to treating subject matters tightly connected to Israel-Palestine Studies. For instance, Jerusalem could be studied and researched as a meeting place where people from various backgrounds constitute the uniqueness of that space with their differences and similarities. It is crucial here to study that with openness, patience, and acceptance, rather than treating the subject in a way that enriches only the internal Jewish conversation.

### Conclusion

Jewish Studies is an interdisciplinary field in that it connects people throughout a long period of time and in different locations in the whole world. As part of this mix, the synthesis of Jewish and Islamic Studies offers scholars the opportunity to pursue questions that pertain to the connections and disconnections between Jews and Muslims throughout history. Furthermore, this intellectual cross-pollination has real-world consequences. At the heart of these heady discussions lie sensitive issues such as Israel-Palestine and Jerusalem. These questions will help foster connections between not only fields but people, across continents as well as disciplines.

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# A Jewish Studies in Harness

Saul Noam Zaritt

Jewish Studies often has trouble finding its place in the academy. Where is Jewish Studies exactly? In the United States, following the traditions of ancient philology and coming out of the Cold War legacy of area studies, Jewish Studies programs are often housed, uncomfortably, within departments that privilege regional boundaries Jewish Studies explicitly exceeds. At my own home institution, Harvard University, a course of study in modern Yiddish literature has very little to do with Assyriology and yet the two occupy the same department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. A similar story plays out across the academy, with languages, geographies, and temporalities clashing unabashedly. Many see Jewish Studies' boundary-crossing as an asset, citing the imperative of interdisciplinarity as a new way forward for the academy in the face of the "crisis" in the humanities. And Jewish Studies seems to answer the call, from its philological origins (likely still its most dominant field) to its embrace of the newest methodologies of Sociology, Linguistics, History, Digital and Medical Humanities, and much else in the study of Jewish experience, past and present (*Shofar* 32 [2014] offers a number of reflections on this subject). To be sure, the act of naming a mode of scholarship "Jewish" provides very little certainty or clarity—what Jewish experience, whose Jewish experience? How much certainty and clarity can be expected from a term whose horizons of meaning, as Cynthia Baker's recent monograph *Jew* (Rutgers, 2016) makes so clear, stretch from the derogatory to the everyday to the eschatological? Due to this institutional and methodological ambiguity, there is sometimes a sense that Jewish Studies can mean everything and nothing at all. Its interdisciplinarity can garner both notoriety for the field and enable it to fade into the larger amalgam of humanities disciplines trying (perhaps in vain) to counter accusations of irrelevance in the global present.

**It is not clear where Jewish Studies belongs exactly, but there has been a concerted effort, over some two hundred years, to prove the necessity of such an entity.**

And yet, despite the diffuse boundaries of Jewish Studies, here I am writing an essay about it. Indeed, if there is a professional association, if there is a funding network sponsoring chairs and programs, and if there is some kind of genealogy stretching (venerably or not) back to the nineteenth century, then there must be something that can be called "Jewish Studies." The blunt force of institutional inertia seems to be one way to approach the placement of Jewish Studies within the networks and hierarchies of the academy. It is not clear where Jewish Studies belongs exactly, but there has been a concerted effort, over some two hundred years, to prove the necessity of such an entity. This issue of *AJS Perspectives* marks and celebrates one fifty-year segment of that effort.

That being said, the struggle for institutional inclusion reflects not only the potential "success" of Jewish Studies but also marks its recourse, repeatedly, to a kind of apologetics. From the beginnings of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* to the current instantiations of Jewish Studies in the American academy, there has persisted a desire to defend the importance of Jewish discourse and to underscore the relevance of Jewish actors and texts. (And here I would commend to you Aaron Hughes's *The Study of Judaism: Authenticity, Identity, Scholarship* [SUNY Press, 2013].) Such argumentation imagines a coherent system of knowledge within which a particular node is to be labeled "Jewish" and where its interactions with other discourses can be measured and regulated. By imagining (or fantasizing) a fixed place for Jewish Studies in the academy, scholars articulate a wish not only for internal coherence but also for normalized relations with Jewishness's sometimes antagonistic Others. The failure of such a project, identitarian in nature, as Benjamin Schreier points out in *The Impossible Jew: Identity and the Reconstruction of Jewish American Literary History* (New York University Press, 2015), is a

## Blurring Boundaries

reluctant return to the placelessness or elsewhere-ness of Jewish experience. If Jewish Studies cannot find a home in the academy, some seem to argue that it can hardly continue as a coherent discipline or epistemological structure. The recourse to placelessness, echoing the image of the Wandering Jew, appears for many to run too close to antisemitic discourses, justifying a doubling down on the survivalist rhetoric of Jewish Studies. The interdisciplinarity argument can be seen as one instance of this trend: an apologetics for Jewish Studies within an apologetics for the humanities more broadly.

The need to protest this sense of Jewish Studies floating in some elsewhere is understandable. But, it may be worth trying to approach it from a different vantage point. It makes me think of the “somewhereness” of postwar Yiddish poetry, where an appeal to world poetry or other cultural institutions was not going to save secular Yiddish from its seemingly inevitable fate. Rather than plea for some redemptive intervention, the Yiddish writer Jacob Glatstein allowed, perhaps reluctantly, for a different positioning of Yiddish. In 1961, Glatstein ended a five-part poem entitled “The Joy of the Yiddish Word” (published in *Di freyd fun yidishn vort*) with the following lines (in my translation):

אויף דער מאפע פֿון אזוי פֿיל דאגות,  
ערגעץ וווּ בין איך פֿאַראַן.  
אַ וואַרעמע האַנט, אַ פֿאַרטערט אויג,  
אַ שמייכל גייט מיט מיר אַ גאַנצן טאָג אין שפּאַן.

*Af di mape fun azoy fil dayges  
ergets vu bin ikh faran.*

*A vareme hant, a farrtert oyg,  
a shmeykhl geyt mit mir a gantsn tog in shpan.*

On the map of so many worries,  
I am somewhere.  
A warm hand, a tearful eye,  
a smile going with me a whole day in harness.

Much of this poem is Glatstein’s attempt to come to terms with the status of Yiddish in the postwar period. Like most Yiddish writers, Glatstein was immersed in the atmosphere of mourning surrounding the language and

certainly longed for its former vivacity as the seemingly ubiquitous vernacular of Ashkenazic Jews—from its eastern European past to its global dispersion. In this poem, though, instead of trying to reproduce that imagined and now lost fullness—a kind of imaginative apologetics—the writer looks upon “the map of so many worries” and encounters a sense of placelessness. The poet is “somewhere,” an uncertain location that is neither here nor there. Rather than find this to be an unbearable predicament, the speaker offers a hesitant, if not impossible, gesture into the future: with “a warm hand, a tearful eye” he carries a smile with him “in harness.” “In harness” is a reference to a short-lived literary journal from the 1920s, spearheaded by the Yiddish writer David Bergelson, that invited Yiddish writers to get “in harness” with the Communist International (explored by Gennady Estraiikh’s *In Harness: Yiddish Writers’ Romance with Communism* [Syracuse University Press, 2005]). Glatstein, ever the anti-Stalinist, evokes or even parodies this past form of ideological solidarity in order to arrive at a transformed International that rejects Bergelson’s communism for what he referred to earlier in his career, in 1935, as the “yidintern” (in “Komintern versus yidintern” in *Inzikh*). The poem implies that if one were to go looking for Yiddish’s place in the world, to locate the “yidintern,” one would never find it in a single location (and certainly not under the umbrella of the Soviet Union); or if one indeed thought it could be found, it would be under a kind of gravestone—the overdetermined and static image of suffering and nostalgia. However, in placing oneself “somewhere” the speaker appears to defer this death and hold on to the possibility of some kind of movement, the capacity to arrive elsewhere, to paraphrase Adam Zachary Newton’s monograph *The Elsewhere* (University of Wisconsin, 2005). Yiddish is placed “in harness”—as one would a horse or an ox—with the writer by its side. The poem ends with these two figures—the writer and his language—involved in mechanical, physical labor, dragging themselves (and whatever might be in the carriage behind them) across the map of worries.

What if we imagined the same scenario for Jewish Studies? More than an identitarian project, Jewish Studies marks a kind of labor, dragging the carriage of

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ווילנער פארלאג פון ב. קלעצקין

*Title page from In Shpan, 1926.*

Jewish genealogies across the academic landscape. Following Glatstein's model, we can see how a given scholar need not feel compelled to produce more evidence for the defense of the field but rather can occupy a space "in harness" with Jewish Studies. This pulling and dragging is not in pursuit of some imagined home, but rather acknowledges its remaining somewhere or elsewhere, approaching an unknowable space. I do not want to name this space, and thereby limit it, with such terms as Diaspora or exile. Rather, I see Jewish Studies as a strategy, or what Adam Zachary Newton calls (in *Jewish Studies as Counterlife* [forthcoming], following Derrida) a lever: a mode of scholarship that knows the limits and rules of the academy and yet never allows its practitioners to be fully enfolded in its structures. Jewish Studies can produce scholarship that seizes the university's horse power—along with other strategies and disciplines spread across a map of academic sorrows—to arrive not at the confirmation of its institutional presence but somewhere else, where a contented smile might still be possible.

**The poem implies that if one were to go looking for Yiddish's place in the world, to locate the "yidintern," one would never find it in a single location**

Of course this strategy of refusal is not altogether without risk. A colleague and a friend put it this way: "Is there a difference between refusing to accept the structures of the academy and being refused by them? Can adjunct teachers, lecturers, and contingent faculty really occupy this elsewhere, or is it already a heterotopia to which they have been banished? And what of those nonacademic laborers of the academy—what does this elsewhere do for them?" "Somewhere" is a place of vulnerability—for Yiddish poets, for practitioners of Jewish Studies, and for all the academy's laborers. For Jewish Studies to really do its work it must proceed toward this elsewhere with a mind toward the politics of the "harness." By this I don't mean an expectation that scholars will go about either in ideological lockstep or in a struggle for consensus, trapped in some "inner emigration" as the song "Inner Emigration" by Daniel Kahn and the Painted Bird goes. Rather I mean the kind of solidarity that begins with publications like this one and continues into and beyond the structures of the AJS, not as an institution of apologetics but one that proceeds by invitation and collaboration across the boundaries of the academy. Interdisciplinarity assumes that discreet disciplines can emerge from a stable origin into some form of exchange and then return, enriched, to that same origin. By contrast, a scholarship of elsewhere—with Jewish Studies alongside other scholarly and nonscholarly conglomerations—drags itself away from such calculations to imagine collective labor, collective vulnerability, and an unexpected future.

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# From French Guiana to Hasidic Montreal

Jessica Roda

As an anthropologist and ethnomusicologist specializing in Sephardic/Arab-Jewish and ultra-Orthodox contemporary Jewish life, my research interests focus on music, kinship, and sexuality, as well as interreligious dialogue and international cultural policies. As I was educated in both Europe and North America, my experiences in both continents have led me to acquire expertise in different schools of thought. I started my training with anthropologists, ethnomusicologists, and linguists influenced by the heritage of the French structuralist school at the “Langues, Musiques et Société” laboratory at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Paris (CNRS). While pursuing my PhD at both Sorbonne University and University of Montreal, I attended seminars in anthropology, ethnomusicology, and sociology at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) and CNRS. In Montreal, I discovered post-colonial studies, gender studies, intersubjectivity, and the anthropology of music.

In addition to this university background, I was driven by a passion for a culture, a community, and a musical practice. My PhD, obtained in a joint program through Sorbonne University and University of Montreal, focused on the descendants of Sephardic Jews from the Ottoman Empire who settled in France in the twentieth century. I worked for ten years with this community and several artists performing its heritage in France. Then I pursued my journey in the Sephardic world, but this time with the Moroccan Jewish community of Montreal, the city where I settled in 2010. Over the years, living near the neighborhood where Hasidic Jews established themselves, my fascination with their way of life and culture guided me to begin a new journey into a very different, distinct Jewish niche. My fieldwork among Hasidic Jews led me to first meet with people who had left the community, then people at the edges of the community. In time, I was introduced to Hasidic families and became a professor of socioanthropology, studying religious Jewish women, a majority of whom were Hasidic. One might wonder how and why I became interested in these Jewish communi-

ties and why I have started to look at contemporary Jewish lives with an anthropological and ethnomusicological eye. The responses to these questions have to do with a personal journey that I would like to share.

I was born into a family that had experienced migration, open adoption, composite families, war, and displacement during the Spanish Civil War and the Algerian War of Independence. For many years, my parents continued the family preference for a nomadic lifestyle over a sedentary one. With my brother David, the four of us travelled for years through Australia, the Caribbean, Hong Kong, and Venezuela. When I was six, they chose to settle in French Guiana, named “L’enfer Vert” (green hell) because of its hard climate and its past, burdened with a history of slavery and deportation (prison). In French Guiana, Creoles, Amerindians, Bushinengue, Hmong, Europeans, as well as people from China, Lebanon, Brazil, Haiti, Surinam, and Peru were part of my daily experience and would become my closest friends. Different visions of the world were part of my childhood and my discoveries of human beings. These early experiences with Otherness in religion, kinship, migration, language, and culture influenced my development as a person and as a future anthropologist and ethnomusicologist. It aroused in me a deep desire to understand individual and collective negotiation of systems of values and also a need to socialize with people from very different backgrounds. This diversity was also reflected in the music I was surrounded by, all the time and everywhere. At home, at school, in the street, at the conservatory, or at the beach, I had the chance to listen and sometimes perform classical music, reggae, ragga, zouk, jazz, rock, rhythm and blues, samba, French songs, carnival music, kaseko, grajé, bossa nova, and many others sounds. Dance and theatre were also part of my youth, until my early twenties.

When I left French Guiana to study musicology at the Sorbonne University in Paris, as well as piano and



*Landscape of the author's childhood travels in Martinique. Courtesy of the author.*

modern jazz dance at the Conservatory, I started an identity quest that led me to look back at my own heritage and at my Sephardic Jewish origin. At the age of nineteen, while I was in Montreal for an exchange program, Judaism became part of my life. No longer an artifact from the past that my family had not handed down to me and that I tried to document on an intellectual basis, it then became something that I embodied in my everyday life through the discovery of rituals and prayers.

As this narrative explains, I did not become involved with Jewish Studies at the outset of my academic training. It was the development of my expertise in Jewish life as an anthropologist and ethnomusicologist that progressively led me to be involved in the field. Jewish Studies in the North American sense was not part of the French and the French-Canadian curricula, so it had never been obvious to plunge into such a field of research. Indeed, even if I had the chance to interact with scholars working on Judaism or Jewish music, at research centers specializing in Jewish Studies, and departments of Hebraic Studies issuing diplomas in Hebrew, Yiddish, Judeo-Arabic, or Judeo-Spanish languages (Inalco), it would have been impossible to imagine it as a separate field of study. Furthermore, departments of Jewish Studies generally had very little room, if any, for Sephardic/Arab-Jewish culture, whether through the social sciences or in the humanities. It was only when I started to develop ties with the English North American academic world, after my

PhD, that I started to engage with the field of Jewish Studies, first as a postdoctoral fellow at Concordia University with Erica Lehrer and then at McGill University, in its Department of Jewish Studies.

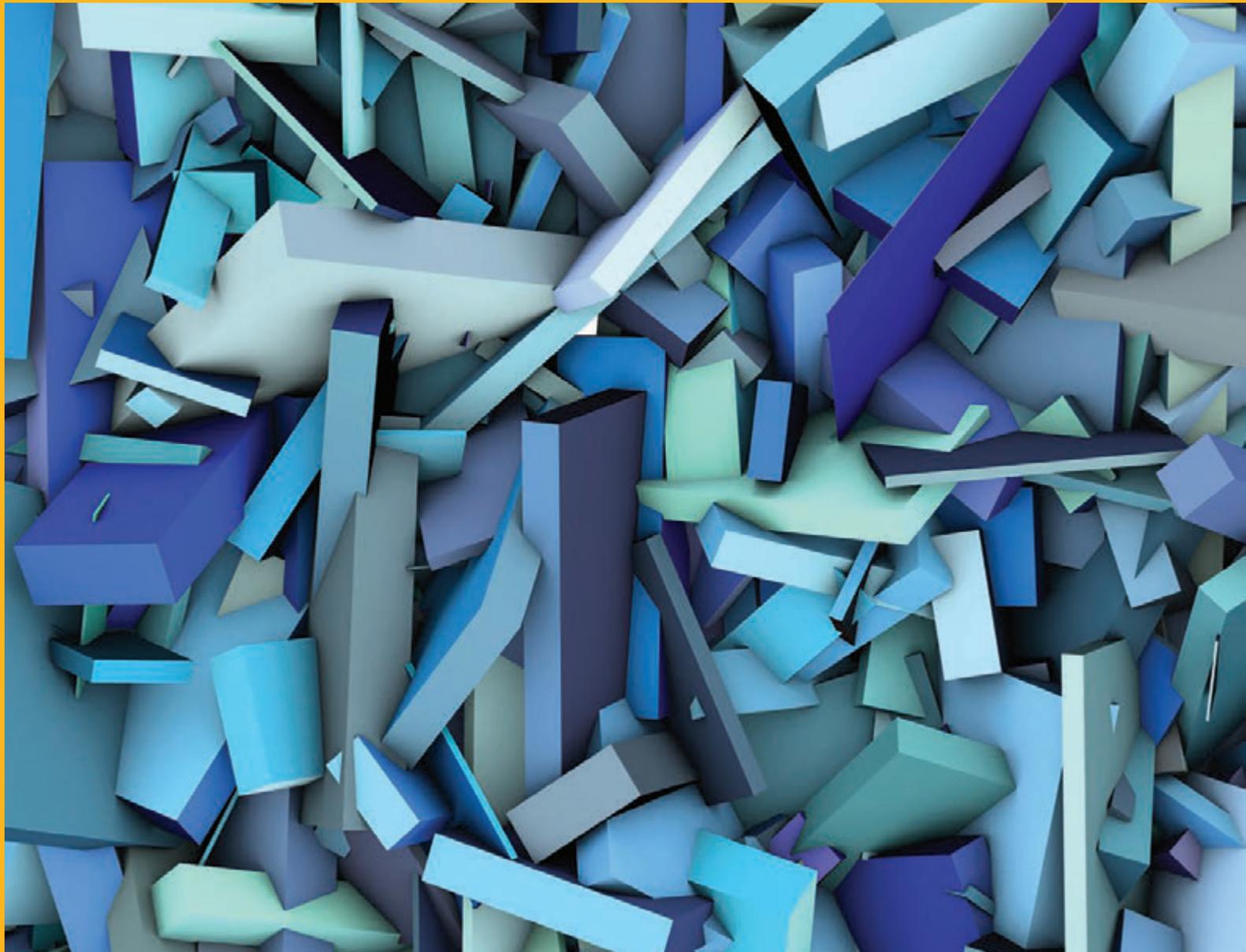
My involvement in Jewish Studies meets the need of a particular time in which scholars studying non-Western Jews and anthropologists working on Jewish topics have started to find a place within departments of Jewish Studies. After an important period of focus on history, theology, philosophy, and eastern European Jewish life, I can foresee the development of a flourishing field within a Jewish Studies department, notably in North America, both for the study of the non-Western Jewish experience as well as on what it means today to experience Jewishness around the globe, which I am sure will bring new and innovative perspectives for Jewish Studies in the twenty-first century.

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# Beyond Buzzwords



In this section, five essays directly address the question, “Where is Jewish Studies going?” Whether considering rabbinic literature or Israel Studies, or any other topic Jewish Studies scholars examine, no field is static, but that doesn’t mean they are all moving in the same or even similar—or predictable—directions. Here we consider just a few of the new pathways along which young scholars are moving Jewish Studies: who the new conversation partners are, where the influences come from, and why this matters

## New Vistas in Rabbinics

Michal Bar-Asher Siegal

In June 2016, I had the honor of being the faculty member on the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev delegation to Rome, to meet with Pope Francis and Vatican leadership. We met Cardinal Kurt Koch, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and Cardinal Jean-Louis Pierre Tauran, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. After sharing how Beer Sheva is now a modern city, much changed from its biblical well-digging days, I was fortunate enough to be able to tell them about my research. I told them that I study Jewish-Christian relations as they are preserved in the Babylonian Talmud, and that contrary to popular opinion, Jews and Christians shared traditions about asceticism and spirituality, repentance and prayer, even into late antiquity. Our conversation about the intertwined relationship between the ancient Jews I study and the ancestors of their own tradition turned to modern-day Jewish-Christian relations, and the challenges these face in a world where religion is never far from our minds.

Sitting there, in Vatican City, the significance of this visit was not lost on me. I am a female Israeli Talmudist. I studied Talmud in a country where this topic was taught solely by men, and mostly to men. I studied philology. I ruined my eyes looking at microfilms of manuscripts. And I fell in love with rabbinic sources. I loved the succinct language and enigmatic phrasing, and the detective work one had to put in to understand the sources, sometimes for the first time in the history of scholarship. I loved that these sources held the roots to Jewish life in Israel. And it was all new to me. Since I was a woman, I was never taught this literature. Academia allowed me access and training to unlock the mysterious difficulties of these texts. My years writing a PhD at Yale added

**Since I was a woman, I was never taught this literature. Academia allowed me access and training to unlock the mysterious difficulties of these texts.**

another dimension to this training—new understanding of the historical contexts and comparative methodologies allowed me to relate rabbinic sources to Christian ones. My teachers in the United States, and we, as their students, are part of a *Zeitgeist* in which the sources are understood to be created, transmitted, studied, and learned in particular contexts. And these contexts matter. It is not a coincidence that my fellow graduate students in Judaic Studies programs all across the United States have gone on to focus a great deal of their work on these contexts. We explore thematic topics such as time and purity laws, as well as more methodological issues such as the redaction of sources, but always with an eye to the ancient worlds—Christian, Greco-Roman, Persian—in which these sources were written. Certainly, we do Rabbinic Studies. We’re looking at late antique texts, after all. But our research matters, I realized, sitting inside Vatican City, because what Rabbinic Studies, alongside the field of Religious Studies in general, now knows is that history, just like present-day events, is complicated. It’s messy. We stopped imagining that our sources tell us about inherently different religious phenomena, as though we can simply describe historical events from a distance. And as we have learned by attending to our own era, our scholarship became more nuanced and multilayered. We became aware of the role our own minds play in depicting the facts. Our own contexts mattered not just for understanding ancient texts, but for describing them in our scholarship.

It matters, as J. Z. Smith has shown, if you are a Protestant scholar depicting the development of early Christianity. And it matters, if you are an American Conservative rabbi, a male Orthodox Jew, or a European non-Jew writing about the Babylonian Talmud. Those who study Rabbinics have learned from other disciplines to create the best representation of a text, using manuscripts, databases, and dusty dictionaries, but at the same time to question the transmission of texts: to follow the long journey by which traditions arrived into our hands, and what that journey possibly did to those traditions. It is an exciting time to be a scholar of Rabbinics. The new tools discovered and transported from other scholarly fields allow for

a slew of new readings of the ancient sources. Persian texts and archeological finds shed fresh light on religious representations in talmudic passages. New skills and techniques help unlock secrets long hidden from view. We see more through our modern-day glasses. In the United States, in particular, we now have many female as well as male Talmudists who bring to light new vistas of scholarly exploration. Postcolonial readings of British scholarship from the nineteenth century suggest alternative ways to read rabbinic passages written in a time when Jewish autonomy in Palestine had recently been lost. And Orality Studies reminds us that while we encounter rabbinic texts in bound volumes, they were once performed and heard.

The future holds even more promises, in the study of rabbinic sources in light of their time, but especially in incorporating methods from apparently unrelated disciplines, such as computational tools and data mining. We can already use algorithms to recreate lost texts from later medieval compilations, as well as read disappearing ink on old parchments. All of these possibilities can help us to paint a picture of the past that is much more accurate than ever before. And we know now, better than ever, our limitations. We recognize the limits to what we can understand of our predecessors’ footprints and the contexts in which they created them. Our scholarly processes now acknowledge the complexities of the human mind and its reflections through the ages on God and his relationship to mortals, now and then.

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*From a compendium of Christine de Pizan's works  
commissioned in 1413, produced by her scriptorium in Paris.  
Harley 4431, f.259v. © The British Library Board.*

# Jewish Studies from Edge to Center

Chris Silver

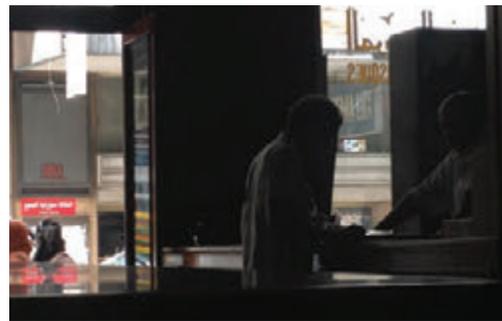
It was an encounter at the far edge of North Africa nearly a decade ago that helped launch my career in Jewish Studies. And it happened quite by accident. In 2009, I saddled up to Le Comptoir Marocain de Distribution de Disques in Casablanca looking for music. But there in that record store, inadvertently paying homage to the 1970s, I found much more than just vinyl. After selecting a small stack of Moroccan records nearly at random, a polyester-clad salesman offered to take them for a test spin on the store's aging turntable. Then, as if whispering history to me, he revealed which of the recording artists just played were Jewish. Effortlessly, the salesman had gestured at the historical phenomenon that I would eventually interrogate in my dissertation: namely, the outsized role played by indigenous Arabophone Jewish musicians in the shaping of North African music and culture for much of the twentieth century. As I learned in time, those artists whose voices had captured my imagination in Casablanca were, in fact, part of a larger narrative, one in which Jewish music makers and music purveyors spanning the Maghrib (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia—and so too, Libya) moved sounds across physical boundaries and borders of genre with impunity well into the 1950s and 1960s.

At the far edge of North Africa, the groundwork was laid for a dissertation-cum-book project that is as engaged with Jewish Studies as it is with Middle Eastern history. Indeed, this is one of its strengths. In writing about Jews and Muslims in the Maghrib in the last century, I have been compelled to ask questions both of the Jewishness of Arab music and of the Arabness (or even Muslimness) of Jewish musicians. And by focusing on Arabic-language music, I have been able to chart the Jewish experience in modern North Africa along a path that differs greatly from the emancipation to assimilation

narrative—which has tended to rely heavily on French-language archives of communal institutions—while highlighting a set of Jewish voices so often missing from its Middle Eastern historiographical analogue. Far from marginal or exceptional, Jewish vocalists and instrumentalists, porting erstwhile honorifics like *cheikh* and *cheikha* and stage names like Elmaghribi (the Moroccan), Djziria (the Algeroise), and Tounsia (the Tunisian), set the tempo for daily life in the twentieth-century Maghrib alongside Jewish artistic directors, commercial agents of discs, and sonic impresarios of all manner. Their sounds linger in situ, in synagogues and homes from Montreal to Marseilles and from North Hollywood to Netivot, and in the memories of North African Jews and Muslims into the present.

In order to write a history embedded in worn record grooves and dispersed along a multisited, transnational archival trail, I have had the great pleasure of working with sources conventional and novel. Alongside bureaucratic documents in the French colonial archives and national and municipal archives across the Maghrib and in Israel, I have pursued materials as diverse as century-old sound recordings and concert ephemera in bric-a-brac shops and flea markets, while also seeking out the private holdings of aging North African Jewish musicians and their descendants, wherever they are found. Jewish Studies, interdisciplinary by nature and resourceful by custom, has allowed for such a creative approach to writing about a topic like music, which is so often considered ephemeral or lacking the very documents so desired by historians. (And here I would nod to Richard Cullen Rath's article, "Hearing American History" in *The Journal of American History* 95, no. 2 [2008].) In fact, the permeability of Jewish Studies, especially as it intersects with area studies of the greater Middle East and other regions, allows for exactly the type of pathbreaking scholarship of the "in-between"—to paraphrase Sarah Abrevaya Stein's essay, "The Field of In Between" in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (46, no. 3 [2014])—that I find so exhilarating and productive. Jewish Studies, in other words, has provided me with the very space to amplify a history of Jewish musicians, their Muslim colleagues and competitors, and audiences mixed in confession and class—"in-between" historical

Having transitioned from graduate student to assistant professor at McGill, I aim to provide my students, all undergraduates for the time being, with the same intellectual resources I was once given.



*Courtesy of the author.*

actors, which so often exist beyond traditional archives (including Jewish ones) and narratives bound by discipline.

It is exactly the “in-between” quality of this sonic history, in which North African Jews and Muslims performed on stage together or sat side by side at concerts well after divisive political events and with little regard for historiographic binaries, that raises the most piercing questions about what was once possible in the twentieth-century Maghrib and thus makes this story so compelling. Of course, I came to this conclusion with the great assistance of my graduate school advisors at UCLA. Through their tutelage, my Jewish Studies mentors actively prepared me to master the canon and then think past it, to relish in disciplinary borderlands, and to surprise the reader by demonstrating how the seemingly quotidian was in fact the stuff of extraordinary individuals and communities.

Having transitioned from graduate student to assistant professor at McGill, I aim to provide my students, all undergraduates for the time being, with the same intellectual resources I was once given. Promisingly, the most eager among them recognize that what is often considered the historical margin in fact contains compel-

ling stories of the marginalized. I see the future of Jewish Studies in these students, who come from a staggering diversity of backgrounds, who are writing research papers on early twentieth-century Algerian Jewish religious life, on interwar Egyptian Jewish film directors, and on Moroccan Jewish communists at midcentury, and who already understand that every “edge” has its own center. And it is from these “edges” and “margins,” I would argue, that Jewish Studies scholars present and future will write Jewish histories that are truly global in scope. If it was at the edge of North Africa that I made my way to Jewish Studies, it is from within an inclusive Jewish Studies that I now see the future of the field.

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**CHRIS SILVER** serves as the Segal Family Assistant Professor in Jewish History and Culture in the Department of Jewish Studies at McGill University. He earned his PhD in History from UCLA. For Silver’s research, he has been awarded numerous prizes, including from the Posen Foundation, the American Academy of Jewish Research, and the American Institute for Maghrib Studies. His articles have appeared in the Moroccan history journal *Hesp ris-Tamuda*, as well as in a number of popular online and print publications.

# Found in Translation

Hamza M. Zafer

I fell into the study of Judaism through a curiosity about early Islam. As a doctoral student, I wandered serendipitously into the targumim—late ancient Aramaic translations of the Pentateuch—while trying to tackle a question about the Quran. Why did the quranic versions of the most famous stories of the Hebrew Bible—the narratives of the books of Genesis and Exodus—look so *different*? The quranic iterations of modern Western discourses’ arguably most salient myths look very little like the biblical *vorlages*. The quranic narratives share the imagery of the biblical narratives—characters, tropes, twists, and turns—but not their underlying logic. For instance, in the Quran, Noah’s seed is not saved through their father’s righteousness. While the quranic Noah watches from his ark, his son drowns in the deluge beneath “a swelling wave” effectively upending the central crux of the Genesis narrative, which is the continuance of Noah’s line. Similarly, the quranic Abraham is not so much a doting patriarch as much as a rebellious son. The Abraham story that appears most frequently in the Quran is not Abraham’s covenant with God (indeed, the Quran makes no mention of circumcision in this or any other context), or Abraham’s binding of Isaac, or Abraham’s settling the land of Canaan. Rather, the most frequently appearing Abraham story in the Quran does not appear in the book of Genesis at all. The Quran memorializes Abraham most frequently as a son in rebellion against an idolatrous father and an idolatrous patrimony.

The figures of Genesis and Exodus appear in the Quran as rather faint mirrors of their biblical *vorlages*. Generations of scholars of the Hebrew Bible hence have tackled this question about quranic narrative—the reasons for its jarring dissimilarities—as a kind of pet project. The operative assumption that lay beneath much of their inquiry was that the Quran’s author had gotten the stories “wrong.” The task of the quranic historian or philologist



Top: “Yusuf running away from Zulaykha” from *Yusuf and Zulaykha*, by Abd al-Rahman Jani, Persia, 1853. JTSL MS 1534, f.89. Courtesy of The Library of The Jewish Theological Seminary.

Bottom: “Yusuf and Zulaykha holding hands” from *Yusuf and Zulaykha*, by Abd al-Rahman Jani, Persia, 1853. JTSL MS 1534, f.84. Courtesy of The Library of The Jewish Theological Seminary.

was hence to posit how the author got them wrong. What elements needed to be added to or subtracted from the biblical “original” to produce the quranic “derivative”? At worst this assumption imagined the Quran as a textual artifact left over from an early heretical outgrowth of Christianity. At best, it imagined the Quran as the product of a kind of accidental textual dissonance. In other words, it was a hodgepodge of biblical-ish narrative materials, broken down and rearranged in nonsensical or less sensical forms. I had grown up deeply embedded in the quranic stories and was *most* familiar with Noah whose son perishes in the flood or the Abraham who destroys his father’s cultic altar (and then wryly blames the biggest “idol” for the destruction). The biblical precursors of these quranic figures—and the narrative cosmos that they inhabited—were novel and unfamiliar. It is in the Jewish literature of the third to seventh centuries, I found this world of exegetical play that allowed me to make sense of quranic narrative. It is specifically in the study of the targumim from the middle of the first millennium that allowed me to read the stories of the Quran not as passive derivatives of the Hebrew Bible but as confident retellings, translations, for a new age of globalism. The biblical stories, the “originals,” functioned as a kind of shared interpretive matrix that stretched far into the west Arabian desert.

Late antiquity—the world of the Quran—was a period of tremendous interpretive activity around the Hebrew Bible. In these centuries following the Christianization of the Roman Empire, the stories of the Bible became a shared vocabulary of a larger and larger swath of humanity. The targumists of this period interpreted the Hebrew Bible stories for Jewish communities who lived all over the Hellenistic world, in southern Europe, in North Africa, in Arabia and across the Levant, in southern Iraq and across the Iranian Plateau. Their translations reflect this period’s emergent cosmopolitanism and urbanization. It is in this period that populations across a very large swatch of southern and western Eurasia and North Africa begin to first share a narrative vocabulary in the Hebrew Bible. Modern Judaism as we know it was shaped by the “universalizing” of biblical narrative, expressed in part in the targumim.

### **Christian or Eurocentric supersessionism in the study of the Hebrew Bible imagines Judaism as a static system that was fully formed at the time of early Christianity.**

Christian or Eurocentric supersessionism in the study of the Hebrew Bible imagines Judaism as a static system that was fully formed at the time of early Christianity. This bias has shaped how the Quran has been studied. The targumists remind us that Judaism itself had a great multiplicity of interpretive traditions and linguistic traditions that reflected the multiplicity of Jewish contexts. The figures of Genesis and Exodus became truly global figures during this time and the targumists produced interpretations for this heated exegetical marketplace. The targumim are just as novel or as dissimilar to the Hebrew Bible in their narrative logics as the Quran. They have just as much exegetical confidence. Becoming familiar with this late ancient corpus of Jewish writing has really enriched my study of the Quran and my understanding of quranic narrative. I am hopeful that the rising interest in this seminal period of Jewish and Islamic thought—the middle of the first millennium—will nuance the way in which the relationship of the Hebrew Bible and the Quran is characterized. Judaism and Islam are characterized implicitly in relationship to Christianity. The latter is the “old” outdated static antecedent and the latter is a “new” heretical outgrowth. When studied outside this framework, we can see the Jewish and Islamic traditions as sharing an interpretive world with equal agency and authorial confidence.

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# My Heart Is in the East ... Where Is Jewish Studies?

Lior Sternfeld

**A generation of scholars trained in Middle East history has created a new subfield focused on the study of Middle Eastern societies in a period of rapid changes through the unique perspective of minority Jewish communities in various degrees of belonging and assimilation.**

I started my academic journey in 2003 at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. I decided to pursue a double-major degree in Middle East Studies and Jewish Studies—in a program that would later develop into Israel Studies. The academic program in the Department of Middle East Studies proved to be extremely demanding, and at the same time, satisfying. The training I underwent involved four mandatory major surveys, learning Arabic from scratch, and loads of reading. The program in Jewish Studies/Israel Studies, on the other hand, was much more lenient. No new language skills were required, most of the assigned readings were in Hebrew, and courses were in high demand, with very few assignments, if any. In short, it had all the ingredients that a popular Liberal Arts program could have for an undergraduate student. And yet, I felt that the field of Jewish Studies was not attractive to me as an undergraduate student, nor, perhaps, as a prospective graduate student and professional scholar. First, for someone with active research interest in Middle Eastern Studies, there were few if any intersections with Middle Eastern Jewish Studies. In Israel, there was still only one prominent narrative regarding millennia of Jewish existence in the region: a variant on the lachrymose narrative, in the words of Salo Baron, that refracted thousands of years through the lens of less than a century of Zionist triumphalism. The courses and readings never suggested a different approach or reading of Jewish pasts in the Middle East. I decided to focus on Middle East Studies and went into a master's program in that department. Subconsciously, I may have wanted to stay away from Jewish Studies and from the Jewish history of the region. I wrote my master's thesis on one of the glorious moments of the Iranian national movement, took two

years of Persian, and planned out a research trajectory that aimed toward studying the history of Iran in the broader context of the modern Middle East.

In 2009 I entered the PhD program in the University of Texas at Austin's Department of History. I took many more classes on the history of the Middle East, in global history, and on the Third World, and I was about to begin my archival work and comprehensive exams in those fields. However, as I was writing my very last seminar paper in graduate school I decided to write on religious minorities in the Iranian revolution of 1979. After a long time of having no contact with the field of Jewish Studies, I finally found what I had been looking for. I came across the fascinating story of Jewish involvement in the Iranian revolutionary movement. It was almost entirely absent from Iranian or Jewish Iranian scholarship. I ended up discovering this untold account of Jewish histories of the Middle East and continued on to write my dissertation, "Writing Jewish History in Iran." The work of scholars like Joel Beinin, Orit Bashkin, Sarah Abrevaya Stein, Michelle Campos, Julia Phillips Cohen, Rami Ginat, Joshua Schreier, Aomar Boum, and others inspired me to take this trajectory of complicating existing accounts and analyzing Jewish history in Iran and the Middle East with this newly found toolkit.

In the past twenty years, the field of Jewish Studies in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has become one of the most exciting fields both in Jewish Studies and Middle East Studies. Suffice it is to say that there's an ever-increasing number of panels and presentations in the annual conferences of MESA (Middle East Studies Association) and the AJS. A generation of scholars trained in Middle East history has created a new subfield



Front page of a Jewish-Iranian semi-communist newspaper from the 1920s. Courtesy of the author.

focused on the study of Middle Eastern societies in a period of rapid changes through the unique perspective of minority Jewish communities in various degrees of belonging and assimilation. Through the prism of Jewish history in the region we learn a great deal about globalization in the nineteenth century; trade networks; education networks; the emergence and shaping of national identities across the region; the role of universal ideologies such as fascism and communism in the social development of modern societies; differences between the objectives of these globalist ideologies between Europe and the MENA region; the impact of Zionism and the establishment of Israel in 1948; and the integration of the Arab intellectual sphere into broader discussions in Europe, Asia, the Americas, and elsewhere. The mission of Jewish Studies, at least in the discipline of history, should be to study Jewish pasts in the context of broader societies, to eliminate “Jewish exceptionalism,” and to adopt methodological approaches that facilitate transnational and intercommunal thought, not just as buzzwords.

I believe that we are seeing a change of direction in Jewish Studies in recent years. I would love to see more studies that delve deeper into the Jewish experience beyond pogroms and persecution. I want to read more about the millennia of Jewish life in Poland before the Holocaust, I want to read about Jewish migration other than to Europe to North America (e.g., migration to Latin

**I would love to see more studies that delve deeper into the Jewish experience beyond pogroms and persecution.**

America, South Africa, North Africa, and India, just to name a few examples). I want to see studies of relations between Jewish migrants and their non-Jewish compatriot-migrants in their new homelands—like Lebanese Jews, Muslims, and Christians who arrived in Latin America, for example: How did they reconnect in their new communities? What was the nature of relations between Jewish communities and other minority communities? We should read about nationalism in contexts other than Zionism, and more topics that await closer analysis. I think that the field of Jewish Studies can benefit greatly from changing the focus to Jews and Jewish history as part of larger, more complex histories, as part of broader, more diverse communities.

**LIOR STERNFELD** is assistant professor of History and Jewish Studies at Penn State University. His book, *Between Iran and Zion: Jewish Histories of Twentieth-Century Iran*, will be published by Stanford University Press in 2018. The book examines the integration of the Jewish communities in Iran into the nation-building projects of the twentieth century

# Fifty: A View from the Middle

James Adam Redfield

What's in a number? Unlike a name, nothing. Step into a cemetery anywhere in the world and our empathic antennae pop up. *Look, she's got the same name as my grandmother ... these three were related ... a child's nickname ...* Even if the epitaphs are illegible, we want to brush away the cobwebs: where there's a name, we see another person underneath, with a story waiting to be deciphered. Now picture a cemetery populated purely by chiseled numbers: 889. 1,686. 19,247. Is that a chill in the air? Corpses get numbered. Names are a form of memory, always already alive.

At closer range, however, the distinction's an optical illusion. Names draw power from being wired into languages dense with associations that we can't escape. Rather than forget a name, Freud noted, we often substitute it by another: both original and substitute play on a single psychic theme. Names are just the hook; we're the anchor. Any other set of signs can trigger the same intensities. Culture bundles into numbers no less easily than names, as long as the conventions, the language, remain firmly established. For most of us, 1,686 is just a number, but six million is a memory, too.

Today, we're telling stories about ourselves in the image of a jubilant round number—fifty. Could any other be as sweet? None of a century's historical pretensions, a millennium's apocalyptic pangs, seasonal fluctuations, or generational mess. A harmonious interval: fifty days in the liturgy from Exodus to Sinai (unless you're a Boethusian); fifty cubits encircle Ezekiel's temple; a Levite retires at fifty (*halevai!*). Fifty equals כח: whole, full, complete—and impressive. Fifty souls get God talking. An upstart's entourage has fifty runners. A villain lands on the wrong end of his fifty-cubit stake. It's zilch on a dreidel, but fifty (י) also facilitates border-crossing translations, like Aramaic "fish": a symbol that Jews and Christians associated with both Joshua and his messianic namesake.

Between these three aspects—completion, power, connection—fifty seems a blessed number to be.

Fifty's connective aspect—its intermediate state between aleph and tau, zero and a hundred—is precisely where Jewish Studies, late antiquity, and my autobiography converge. That middle zone, however, is hard to access. We tend to define the middle negatively by subtracting from extremes. If middle age is seen as a hiatus between youth and death, midlife crises are the inevitable result. In an era of progress, the middle is synonymous with mediocrity. The law of the excluded middle is a logical axiom, albeit no longer, for some of us, a biological one. (*Halevai!* My age is tilting closer to fifty than eighteen; far from venerable, but tiptoeing towards a middle.) The Middle Path was born in opposition to extremes of asceticism; the Golden Mean hovers between virtue and vice. Yet can we clear space for a celebration of middle-ness that is not merely suspended between more potent poles?

Perhaps the question arises from incipient middle age, but one answer is a cultural period: late antiquity. In a story of Rome's decline and fall, as classical antiquity gave way to the Christian medieval West, "late Judaism"—stripped of state and temple—was its lachrymose corollary. Over the past fifty years, however, historians have revealed a revival of late antique Judaism(s). Elites' traffic with their peers, as well as broader exchanges in archives and archaeology, have relocated Jews in a thriving East Roman (and, to an extent, Sasanian) culture. This anchoring trope of "late antiquity"—not as an end, but as a cultural contact zone—mirrors our own postmodern period, encouraging the constructively minded to project its sources forward onto contemporary questions. If the decline of imperial power is not our story, how can we carve out more lateral, rhizomatic relations? If social media are not to be our social mediators, what might we glean from reinventing a textual tradition?



*The Bunting Clover Leaf Map, 1581. Source: Wikimedia Commons*

The other middle ground where many of us work is not a period but a practice: ethnography, the art of storytelling in medias res. For five years, before turning to late antiquity, my most productive time was spent watching concepts and institutions tick in the habits and idioms of daily life. But could one do ethnography in the past? Peter Brown and other scholars of late antiquity seemed to say yes, and talmudic literature teemed with ethnographic impulses—electrified by teachers who read widely. In the process of changing fields, and dissertations, some of those impulses were later flattened by the harsh light of philology and context. Yet in other ways, this transition was surprisingly organic. Being in the middle of people doing things is how rabbis and ethnographers alike practice thinking. My job is to compare their methods, concepts, and consequences—ideally with implications for both.

Like late antiquity as a period, ethnography as a practice, and the postmodern as an ethos, Jewish Studies at fifty has become a fertile middle ground for cultural exchange. Not free from the acute teleologies and

hierarchies of society at large, yet not completely unconscious of them either, it's an excluded middle where, for now, we dwell. If more can do so, in greater comfort, its next Jubilee will be that much brighter. So rather than an end (the end of academic marginality!) or a beginning (the advent of an institution!), let's fête this number with a view from the middle. Progress? Of course. But not yet.

**JAMES ADAM REDFIELD** is assistant professor of Biblical and Talmudic Literatures in the Department of Theological Studies at St. Louis University. He received his PhD in 2017 from Stanford University in Religious Studies. His main research and graduate teaching areas are late antique Judaism and the history of anthropology. James also teaches undergraduate courses on the Hebrew Bible and premodern travel writing. He enjoys translating literature and scholarship.

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# Pathways In

Fifty years ago, “Jewish Studies” focused on a relatively narrow range of topics, and those who were “doing” Jewish Studies were a fairly homogeneous group (that is, identifying as both male and Jewish). Today, scholars from an ever-expanding range of areas and from increasingly diverse backgrounds have found their way in—or stumbled into—Jewish Studies, and the field is both growing and shifting as a consequence. In the essays in this section, the authors share autobiographical reflections that address the implications of that history and suggest how it is, or should be, changing.



## In the Weeds

Adrienne Krone

I spent most of the afternoon of June 16, 2016 weeding at Abundance Farm in Northampton, Massachusetts. The farm sits on a one-acre lot next to Congregation B'nai Israel, a Conservative synagogue; Lander-Grinspoon Academy, a Jewish day school; and the Northampton Survival Center, a food pantry. The farm is used as a space for Jewish education for students at the school and for education and Jewish holiday programming for the Northampton Jewish community. The food grown on the farm is incorporated into the “Pick Your Own” program run by the Survival Center. This program enables people to pick fresh fruits, vegetables, herbs, and flowers to supplement their boxes filled mainly with processed foods. On the afternoon of June 16, temperatures crept up into the eighties and the sun beat down on me as I

filled two wheelbarrows with plant material so the farm staff could plant beans and squash in a small corner of the farm. It may have been a combination of exhaustion and dehydration, but as I removed plant after plant, including flowers, herbs, and remnants of bean and squash plants from prior years, I began to think about what it means to designate something a “weed” and the inevitable removal that follows the application of that designation.

Weeds are commonly described as plants growing in the wrong place. Weeds may be plants that have value, but they are often valued less than other plants whose presence is preferable for any number of reasons. For example, dandelions are aesthetically pleasing, they support pollinator populations, and their greens contain high levels of essential vitamins and nutrients. But they tend to grow among lawn-covering grass. We don't want to steer our lawnmowers around patches of dandelions. We don't want to crouch down and pick dandelions one

**My explanations often lead my interlocutors to scoff that this doesn't sound like "real" Judaism.**

by one in the hot sun. We don't want to learn how to cook the greens. Creating a space inclusive of dandelions and cultivating them for their valuable resources requires time and energy, so we often decide it is easier to spray the lawn and get rid of them all.

Professionally, I study contemporary American Judaism and I hold a Jewish Studies position, but I nonetheless often feel like a weed in the field of Jewish Studies. My current project is an ethnographic and historical study of the Jewish community farming movement in North America. This movement consists of more than twenty organizations that serve as alternative spaces for North American Jews to enact their values related to environmental degradation, climate change, animal welfare, and food insecurity. As they engage in small-scale sustainable agriculture in these spaces, they interpret Jewish texts, innovate Jewish practices, and develop their Jewish identities.

The field of Jewish Studies cultivates a wide variety of scholars, but it is largely composed of well-defined subfields that complicate entry for those whose work doesn't fit well into them. It seems fitting to note that the Jewish Studies model seems to adhere to the biblical prohibition against *kil'ayim*: the field of Jewish Studies is composed of diverse disciplines but there is not a lot of mixing. I've presented at the AJS annual conference each of the last three years, and each time I was on a panel that was interdisciplinary, albeit sometimes only by virtue of my presence. I've presented on panels composed primarily of literature scholars, sociologists, and scholars of American Zionism. Each time I felt like a weed, though my ability to blend in varied widely. I study Jewish people who engage Jewish texts to innovate Jewish practices, but it has been difficult for me to find a comfortable space within the field to grow.

There are two common responses to my work that reflect its position to the field of Jewish Studies. The first usually takes the form of someone noting that this movement is small and that most Jews don't farm. The movement is small, but it is growing quickly and has expanded from one farm to twenty during the last fourteen years. The movement also engages people beyond those actually working as farmers for holiday celebrations, educational



*"Abundance Farm." Photo by Adrienne Krone.*

programs, and volunteer days. The second is usually an inquiry into what is "Jewish" about these farms. I often use an example and explain that this may look like a farm outside of Baltimore leaving their fields fallow during the *shmitah* year or a farm in Toronto prioritizing stewardship through their pollinator repopulation program. My explanations often lead my interlocutors to scoff that this doesn't sound like "real" Judaism. These questions and responses reinforce boundaries. They contain within them assumptions about what Judaism looks like, where it happens, and when it is worth scholarly attention. Questions like this designate entire groups of Jews and the scholars who study them as weeds.

This is the *yovel* (Jubilee) year of the Association of Jewish Studies annual conference. The biblical vision of the *yovel* year called for slaves to be set free and for land to be returned and re-distributed. We have the opportunity to engage the spirit of *yovel* to think about what Jewish Studies has been and what it can be. We can set ourselves free from our assumptions and re-think what Jewish Studies is and isn't. We can reconsider the categories we use and the boundaries between them. We can redistribute power and privilege in our field and help cultivate a new generation of scholars. We have an opportunity to make Jewish Studies a more inclusive space, and if we do, scholars and their scholarship will be weeds no more.

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**ADRIENNE KRONE** is assistant professor of Religious Studies and director of Jewish Life at Allegheny College. Her research focuses on food and farming practices in contemporary American religions. Her current project is an ethnographic and historical study of the Jewish community farming movement in North America.

# Drawing My Jewish Studies Journey

Sarah Lightman

These front-cover drawings form part of my autobiographical graphic novel, *The Book of Sarah* (Myriad Editions, 2019), begun during my first year as an undergraduate at the Slade School of Art at University College London. This is a book of books, charting my personal and also intellectual history, through notebooks, sketchbooks, diaries, as well as drawings of artist monographs and academic publications: from the shelves of books on Orthodox Jewish thought abandoned at my parents' house, to my own new library of works by Jewish feminist writers: Alicia Ostriker, Laura Levitt, Ruth Gilbert, and Nadia Valman.

My knowledge of Jewish Studies was, until five years ago, mostly filtered through a Modern Orthodox lens. While I grew up in a British Jewish home, with an emphasis on religious practice, my family did not have a library of Jewish books, and I have never attended a Jewish day school. Instead I was introduced to Jewish Studies outside the home, at Bnei Akiva summer camp and the Orthodox women's seminary/yeshiva, Midreshet Lindenbaum, in Jerusalem during my gap year. The latter provided my first taste of independence, but it was a shock to inhabit this American/Israeli space, where I had neither the Hebrew literacy nor the fund of knowledge to make sense of the classes.

My yeshiva was also a religious world in which women did not write, but were written about, silenced, and disempowered. We learned Gemara, a radical move in many circles, yet our access to these religious books did

**Even though I was learning the once-forbidden texts, I was still a passive audience, in a space where women's intellectual contributions rarely featured.**

not transform their contents. The ancient rabbinic discourses themselves were marked by exclusion and inequality, and I sat at the back of these classes, misunderstanding the Hebrew texts, suppressing my personal contemporary responses, and bound by the decrees of the male rabbis. Even though I was learning the once-forbidden texts, I was still a passive audience, in a space where women's intellectual contributions rarely featured.

When I was researching my PhD, "Dressing Eve and Other Reparative Acts," at the University of Glasgow, I focused on four different comics artists and their feminist reappropriation of biblical iconography and text in graphic novels. A highlight of my studies was when I was awarded a grant to study, for one month, at Columbia University in New York City, where I could meet, in person, some of the key voices of my research, the people behind the books. One of these women was Alicia Ostriker, whom I visited in her home. Ostriker's animated analysis of her jealousy of the male intellectual experience resonated with my own feelings, such as when she writes in *The Nakedness of the Fathers: Biblical Visions and Revision*: "Not mine the arguments of the Talmud, not mine the centuries of ecstatic study, the questions and answers twining minutely like vines around the living Word, not mine the Kabbalah, the letters of the Hebrew alphabet dancing as if they were the attributes of God ... I am not permitted to be a scholar" (Rutgers University Press, 1994, p. 6). I had these feelings, too, but, back in the uncreative space of the yeshiva, I had no tools to respond. It was only later, when I returned to London and was attending art school and involved in the creation of *The Book of Sarah*, that I established myself as a legitimate interpreter of texts, a named female author, the subject and voice of biblical interpretation, one who is physically present, embodied, and embedded in her responses.



All images: Courtesy of the author.

*The Book of Sarah* creates a book of the Bible in a space initially defined by absence, for Sarah dies on the threshold of her own Torah portion, *Hayye Sarah* (“the life of Sarah,” beginning with Genesis 23:1). Unlike the matriarch, I begin my life at that point, and I interplay my own experiences of life, including maternal jealousy and late motherhood, with those of the biblical Sarah. One early page of *The Book of Sarah* is a type-printed page, the only one in this style within my whole project. The page was created when I was an undergraduate during a print project day with the artist Bruce McLean. I argue with imagined rabbinic voices in defense of my project, while also writing their text. I am the commentator on my own story. Here, too, I have drawn a parallel with Alicia Ostriker, in our shared personal autobiographical approach to Jewish Studies. In *Feminist Revision and the*

*Bible*, she observes: “Layers of biblical textuality come into play with layers of my own identity and family history; I interpret the Bible, while it interprets me. Absolutely no room in this work for a distance of self and text or the false duality of subject and object. We intermingle and bleed into each other” (Blackwell, 1993, p. 112). Ostriker’s metaphor reflects my biblical journey, a visceral continuity of developing self that blurs personal and familial boundaries through my reading of biblical texts. I, like Ostriker, am merging and spilling over into an intimate biblical engagement, in my drawings and writings. I am drawing upon knowledge that I have obtained from reading, I am making art about writing, I am writing within my art. My academic and creative worlds are bleeding and twining around each other.

Laura Levitt, concluding her 1997 study of Jewish feminism, traditions, and America, *Jews and Feminism: The Ambivalent Search for Home*, writes, "Although I have discovered that the realm that once seemed strange and distant has become more familiar and that what was once familiar has now become strange, I know that I can locate myself in writing" (Routledge, p. 164). My own struggle was to locate myself in a Jewish space where I could be both artist and academic, creator and interpreter. Over the last few years, I have found that I can render all these multiple roles within my drawings of these books. The front cover of *Torat Hayyim* exists in a liminal space, because my input is somewhere in between copying, interpretation, and originality. My depiction of book covers, from Lori Hope Lefkowitz's *In Scripture* to Alicia Ostriker's *Feminist Revision and the Bible*, represent both an act of ownership of Jewish knowledge and an acknowledgement of intellectual imperfection.

By definition, the books in my drawings cannot be opened, nor can the bent, worn pages of Nadia Valman's *Jewish Women Writers in Britain* (Wayne State University Press, 2014) be flattened or smoothed out, yet we can see that the actual books have been read. The cover designs that are the focus of my gaze—for example, Ruth Gilbert's *Writing Jewish Contemporary British Jewish Literature* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)—are drawn simplified, stretched, or squashed, for these are not perfect renditions; they are instead interpretations, an attempt to copy, by eye and by hand. My uneven and wobbling pencil lines in my drawing of *The Telling*, by Esther Broner and Naomi Nimrod (HaperSanFrancisco, 1993), reveal me as a copyist who wants very much for this drawing to be her handwriting, her signature draughts-womanship. Most of all, my hours spent sketching these books are an act of gratitude, as these publications have helped me and changed me, and developed my way of thinking and feeling. I am finding my self and making my own graphic novel, because these books have enabled my self-creation. My drawings speak of a desire to visualize this digestion of knowledge, an embedded footprint from my past to my present.

**Ostriker's metaphor reflects my biblical journey, a visceral continuity of developing self that blurs personal and familial boundaries through my reading of biblical texts.**

As my time in Jerusalem highlighted, I also must continue to integrate my experiences of British Jewish life and learning in order to reflect my personal geography. A subtitle for my graphic novel is *The Hampstead Bible*, and in 2014, I gave permission for the Jewish feminist writer Nadia Valman to use my artwork on the cover of her book *Jewish Women Writers in Britain*. She acknowledges my contribution thus: "Thanks to Sarah Lightman, an extraordinary documentarist of her experience as a British Jewish woman." In this self-portrait I present myself writing and drawing, and my image literally embraces the pages of Valman's book, including discussions of the works of Amy Levy, who is described by Valman as "an apt muse for the generations of British Jewish women writers who have returned again and again to the experience of alienation, of living between two worlds, as a source of critique and creativity." American authors opened my eyes to a new approach to Jewish Studies, but I must now continue to build a lens that reflects my life and experience as a British Jewish woman, artist, and academic.

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**SARAH LIGHTMAN** is an artist, curator, and comics scholar. She won an Eisner Award for her first book, *Graphic Details: Jewish Women's Confessional Comics* (McFarland, 2014), and she is currently completing a graphic novel, *The Book of Sarah* (Myriad Editions, 2019). She is an Honorary Research Fellow at Birkbeck College, University of London (2018–19).

# A Sense of Community

Mijal Bitton

I begin an accounting of my work with a confession: I entered academia as a woman deeply steeped in traditional Jewish life who wanted a title—any title—that would bestow upon me some measure of authority among the more traditionally ordained male rabbis. Having a different honorific—“Doctor” or “Professor”—in front of my name would make up a bit, I hoped, for my not having the “Rabbi” title that most of my Orthodox colleagues had. And so, I enrolled in New York University’s PhD program in Education and Jewish Studies (based at Steinhardt and Skirball), trusting I’d find my academic calling along the way.

I was initially fascinated by the differences between Jewish Studies and the *bet midrash*, particularly, the subjectivity of scholars who inhabited both. Was Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi right in his prediction that the journey from Jewish memory to Jewish history corresponds with somewhat “fallen” Jews? More personal was my core inquiry: can particularistic commitments survive—even thrive—in the face of modernity? My forays into the intellectual traditions of the sociology and anthropology of religion deepened this line of inquiry. I wanted the study of collective sacrality—its functions and meaning-making abilities—to inform our capacity to negotiate both modern and sacred consciousness. Practically speaking, this interest yielded a firm commitment to investigating Jewish life in America, a country where the traditional affirmation “... *Who has separated us from the nations*” feels increasingly fictional.

Immersing myself in the sociology of American Jews became an exercise in another form of *havdalah*, separation. No matter what I read, a nagging voice reminded me that the American Jews depicted in the literature I was reading were not *my* American Jews. Mine use Farsi or Arabic slang words, sing *pizmonim* in guttural tones, and do not grapple with denominationalism.



*Ketubah. Damascus, Syria, 1890. Mane-Katz Museum, Haifa, Israel, Ms. 14. Ketubot Collection of the National Library of Israel.*

My American Jews, Sephardic Jews from Muslim countries, are almost invisible on the American scene. The discourse around American Jewry generally assumes Ashkenazic and white and Western characteristics. This discourse was woefully incomplete.

Most frustrating, I found, was the absence of categories to capture this population, whom I consider Sephardic, based on their self-definition and the historical development of the category of “Sephardic” in America. Yet, historians of Sephardic Jewry have excluded my American Jews from their purview, because most of them did not originate in the Iberian Peninsula. The few scholars who do remember these Jews have used terms like “Levantine,” “Oriental,” “Eastern,” or “Mizrahi”—categories that are deeply prejudiced or are foreign to the subjects in question. How then, shall we term them, these Iraqi and Syrian and Persian American Jews who use the *Shulḥan ‘arukh* as their legal guide and who identify as Sephardim?

The desire to remedy the near absence of Sephardim in the scholarship of American Jews aligned with my interest in exploring Jewish collectivities. With the support of particularly encouraging and dedicated professors at NYU, I entered uncharted territories, seeking a Sephardic portrait of the American Jewish

experience. For this, I chose to focus on a group of Syrian Jews who live in New York and identify as a community. This social group presents a multilayered paradox for outside observers. Led by the descendants of pre-1924 immigrants, it has retained a collective ethnicity rare for fourth- and fifth-generation Americans. Insiders have high rates of in-marriage, comparable to that of Haredi Jews, but without similar expectation of homogeneous adherence to Jewish law. Its members have attained socioeconomic success, but eschew other markers of the “American dream,” such as graduate education and geographic upward mobility. Examining this community demanded analysis of the categories commonly used to study American Jews—such as religion and Orthodoxy—and introducing new ones, such as traditionalism.

As an insider/outsider, I enjoyed access to this community, and conducted ethnographic fieldwork there for two years, combining my own observations with over a hundred interviews and archival research. Slowly, themes emerged that helped me make sense of this enigmatic community. I explored the fusion of Middle Eastern traditionalism and Ashkenazic Orthodoxy, the contemporary implications born out of the continuous absorption of Middle Eastern immigrants between 1948 and 1994, and the different processes of assimilation and Americanization that led Syrian Jews to identify as Sephardic. Most importantly, a thesis emerged for my dissertation: the surprising maintenance of this social group is based on the interaction between mostly soft (i.e., unofficial, dynamic, implicit) collective boundaries and one one rigid (official, clear, bright) collective boundary.

Despite the fact that my doctoral research became a deep and abiding passion, I was never exclusively cloistered inside the academic world. Seeing so many talented and hard-working friends and colleagues unable to find proper employment forced me to confront the changing nature of the academic job market and to abandon expectations that good work necessarily leads to a good position. This attitude, combined with personal aspirations to influence the Jewish community, led to semesters filled with a combination of teaching, community building, and activism, alongside my doctoral research. For years, my *modus operandi* was to attain the

credentials for both an academic job and position of leadership inside the Jewish community. But this dual commitment is not simple, and I eventually was pressed to decide my career path.

One conversation helped illuminate my professional decision—a discussion I had with Christine Hayes (now the AJS’s president). She suggested that I shift my focus from the type of *position* I envisioned for myself, in order to make explicit what I wanted to be *doing* in my career. And so I came to articulate for myself that I wanted a profession where I could teach, write, research, earn a decent salary, live in the city of my choice, have supportive colleagues, and make a positive contribution to society. This new articulation of ambition helped me move forward to where I am today.

I recently finished my dissertation on the Syrian Jewish community, and aim to publish it, as a means of shedding light on this lesser-known American Jewish experience. My work will be of value not only to academics but also to fellow Americans invested in particularistic communities and collective ethnoreligious boundaries. Sidestepping the academic job market for now, I have enthusiastically accepted a position as Fellow in Residence at the Shalom Hartman Institute, a pluralistic center of research and education which has nurtured me as a doctoral fellow for the last four years, where I will deepen my research, teaching, and writing. The vagaries of life (perhaps providence) have also brought me to lead my own religious community, where I need no PhD, ordination, or title to lead a collective of spiritual seekers, but where my learning is nonetheless valued. As I reflect on my journeys so far, I feel grateful for the chance that I have been given, the mentors who have guided me along the way, and the opportunity I have right now to spend my time doing the work I love.

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**MIJAL BITTON** is a Fellow in Residence at the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America. She is a PhD candidate and Avichai Fellow at New York University, where she is studying the collective boundaries of a contemporary Sephardic community in the United States. Mijal is the cofounder and Rosh Kehilla of the Downtown Minyan and is an alumna of the Wexner Graduate Fellowship.

# Knock-Knock! It's Diversity at the Jewish Studies Door

Michael A. Figueroa

*This essay is dedicated to Jonathan Hess, who taught me so much about the vitality of Jewish Studies.*

You're at the 2014 AJS conference, sitting in the bar of the Hilton Baltimore, and see an Arab American, a Puerto Rican, and a lapsed Catholic walk in the room. There's no punch line, and it's not a joke: it's just me, standing there wondering where I should sit. I am attending the AJS for the first time to present my research, unsure of how my mixed backgrounds and training as an ethnomusicologist might mark me as an interloper in this rarified space of intellectual exchange. Allow me to introduce myself.

\* \* \*

My journey to Jewish Studies reveals how our field has a much more diverse set of pathways than one might realize—all the better for us to see the field's new vistas, as the title of this special issue suggests. I am an ethnomusicologist whose research examines Jewish and Israeli music in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. My book in progress argues that musical renderings of Jerusalem have been central to the formation of Israeli political consciousness. In the book, I show how Israeli musicians have critically shaped their public's territorial imagination, dispelling notions that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is timeless, intractable, and based on static, essential identities, and revealing how the conflict's territorial fixation on Jerusalem has been subject to artistic intervention. It is a project that I am passionate about and that remains ever relevant as we enter Israel's seventy-first year of statehood.

I recently spoke about my research at a faculty showcase commemorating the fifteenth anniversary of the Carolina Center for Jewish Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where I teach. Colleagues with



*Former Jerusalem home of poet Yehuda Amichai  
Photo by the author.*

whom I shared the stage represented several disciplines, including History, Language and Literature, Music, and Folklore, and covered the cultural lives of Jews in Europe, the Middle East, and the Americas. Among these distinguished scholars was Jonathan Hess, an extraordinarily kind and generous friend who was—until his untimely death two weeks later—coeditor of *AJS Perspectives*. In his editorial capacity, Jonathan had already invited me to contribute a short essay to this issue. With this “to-do list” item in mind, I sat on the stage and appreciated the diversity of perspectives, methodologies, eras, repertoires, and communities represented there—a diversity that could perhaps only cohere around Jewish Studies as a field—and started mentally composing my essay. Then, Jonathan himself stopped me in my tracks. When he got up to deliver his talk, he urged the audience and his fellow panelists to comprehend the potential for leveraging the specific content of Jewish history to help our students grapple with what he called “the stubborn persistence of systemic forms of prejudice and oppression in our world today.” In addition to antisemitism, among the forms he discussed were white supremacy, Islamophobia, racism, and anti-immigrant hysteria. For me, it was a rare moment in which the helplessness that I normally felt in the face of political ugliness gave way to a sense of momentous obligation and a pathway through which to intervene in the discourse. As a scholar who teaches music made by Jewish, Muslim, and Christian communities in and from the Middle East—in other words, some of the groups most targeted for denigration by the current US president and his followers—I saw anew the political and social value of my work in the classroom and at large. But that's not the whole story.



*Synagogue Aben Danan, Fes, Morocco. Photo by the author*

I entered the field of Jewish Studies through the back door of language. When I began graduate school at the University of Chicago in the mid-2000s, I signed up for Modern Hebrew as “secondary” language training to the Arabic and Persian classes in which I had planned to enroll. After struggling through my first Yehuda Amichai poem (“Tourists”), I was hooked. As I delved deeper into modern Hebrew poetry and song, with the not-so-subtle encouragement of my mentor Philip Bohlman, a major figure in the global field of Jewish Music Studies, I began to see a future for myself not only in Middle Eastern Studies generally but in Israel-Palestine specifically, and so Hebrew because a primary research language for me. The next step was traveling to Jerusalem for ethnographic fieldwork and more language training—travel that has occupied the bulk of my summer time (and some of the academic year) for nearly a decade (and still running). After that first trip, I eventually wrote a dissertation on musical images of Jerusalem after the Six-Day War, finished the PhD, and landed a faculty job at the University of North Carolina, where I have taught since 2014. I suppose this all sounds rather pedestrian so far: a student discovers a subject, falls in love with it, devotes his life to its study, and becomes one of the lucky few to earn a salary to teach other people about it. Many readers of this publication probably have a similar Jewish Studies story. But my subject is, in fact, the culture of my supposed enemy.

As an Arab-Latinx gentile who was raised in the American South, growing up I had little contact with Jews or with Israel, and what contact I did have was rarely characterized in positive terms, except as history’s victims, in need of rescue by the moral powers of Western Christendom. In the racial discourse that surrounded me, Jews were exotic at best, and subject to ugly stereotypes at worst. As a kid, the only thing I seemed to share with them was my own Otherness. My mother’s family immigrated to the United States from Syria at the turn of the twentieth century, while my father’s family came from Puerto Rico in the 1950s. My dark physical features stood out in a crowd, and only my closest friends could pronounce the foreign names by which I addressed my extended family. Because of the particular circumstances of their immigration, both sides of my family remain ambivalent toward both home and host societies. This constant feeling of cultural liminality, exacerbated by the structural violence that dominates the American public sphere for communities of color, has shaped my world view, intellectual affinities, and professional goals.



*Andalusian musical instruments. Photo by the author.*



*The author at Casa de Sefarad, Córdoba, Spain. Photo by Monica Figueroa.*

My journey through Jewish Studies—a field that is, in many ways, at the vanguard of theorizing Diaspora, race, space, power, gender, and historiography—has been one of self-actualization for me, gentile though I may be. As a product of non-Jewish migratory routes, my relational engagement with Jewish Studies has allowed me to think integratively about my non-Jewish identity and about my research questions about Jewish space and mobility. In the Jewish Studies classroom, when dealing with such issues, I explicitly draw on my families' respective migrations to illustrate culturally and/or academically constructed concepts of community and personhood. For example, in discussions of racial politics and whiteness, I bring into the conversation my Puerto Rican grandmother's attempts to assimilate into the United States as an adult migrant. When explaining the difference between "push" and "pull" Diaspora, I discuss the economic migration of my mother's family out of Syria to contrast with the current refugee crisis stemming from the Syrian civil war. In both cases, I talk to students about the stakes of performing cultural continuity while negotiating life in the host society by disclosing my family's uses of music, rituals, language, and food. Rather than existing in tension with the Jewish culture and history that I teach, these pedagogical decisions highlight the dynamic levels of interconnectedness between Jewish and non-Jewish communities, while suggesting the possibility of alliances between supposed enemies in the present and future.

\* \* \*

It's now closing time at the hotel bar, so let me offer a few of my thoughts about the field's "new vistas" by way of asking some questions. Since my primary research methodology is ethnographic fieldwork, I often think about how social groups maintain boundaries and perform in-group status; I also try to lift up the language of the field for use in theoretical discussion. With these methodological tics in mind, I suggest that we might ask: What are the shibboleths of Jewish Studies as a scholarly community? How are we gatekeepers of access to traditional knowledge? How do we decide membership in inner circle of the discourse—whom do we cite, invite, and mentor? What can Jewish Studies teach non-Jewish scholars and students about themselves and about the world in which they live, and what can we as a scholarly community learn about subjects from listening to their perspectives? How can we seek strategic alliances across traditional political, religious, cultural, and disciplinary divides in order to advocate for human rights for all people, including within the Holy Land, where I work? Can we see Jews, Muslims, Christians, Israelis, Palestinians, refugees, and asylum seekers, and others as equally human? Finally, how can we continue to think outside of Jewish Studies canons, narratives, and theoretical frameworks while maintaining our field as a safe space to explore issues that were historically neglected by traditional disciplines but found life only in a Jewish Studies environment? These are difficult questions to answer. But we, as an aspiring interreligious, interracial, non-gender-binary, socially inclusive, and politically progressive community, continue to grapple with them over the next fifty years of the AJS's history, I find comfort in knowing that my personal and professional lives will be all the richer for having been part of the conversation.

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**MICHAEL A. FIGUEROA** is assistant professor of Music and associate director of the Carolina Center for Jewish Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He researches Jewish and Middle Eastern music and is currently finishing a book on how musicians have shaped Israeli perceptions of Jerusalem in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

# From Old Yiddish to Modern Mentorship

Annegret Oehme

In *The Awful German Language*, Mark Twain highlights the importance of carefully reading typically long German sentences, because a crucial piece of information often awaits the reader at the end. (Despite its title, as we all know, this text is really Twain's love letter to the German language.) My path into the study of Old Yiddish began by following that most American of writers' advice: I carefully read and reread a long German sentence in September 2009, while studying at the Freie Universität. While I was doing research for a term paper, one sentence about a Middle High German story portraying King Arthur and his knights of the round table caught my attention: "Composed presumably between 1210 and 1215, the romance continued to live on through adaptations in prose and their translations into Danish, Icelandic, and Yiddish ..." (Jutta Eming, *Funktionswandel des Wunderbaren* [Wissenschaftlicher, 1999], p. 135). Wait! What? Yiddish? An Arthurian romance in Yiddish? I knew about workers' newspapers, stories of the shtetl, and Yiddish plays performed on the stages of New York, but never had I encountered premodern tales in my Yiddish classes, let alone stories about the legendary King Arthur and his knights of the round table.

A few days later, someone offered me a used copy of Jean Baumgarten's classic textbook, *An Introduction to Old Yiddish Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2005). I read it cover to cover. I could not put it down. Baumgarten opened a whole new world to me, which seemed like a previously blank spot on a map, a barely discovered treasure island. Of course, nobody begins one's undergraduate studies with the long-term goal of writing a dissertation on Old Yiddish. But I was lucky and stumbled across this wonderful and fascinating literature early, a literature that not only has the usual stories of biblical heroes and heroines but also counts among its characters werewolves, knights—and a Jewish pope! Why were scholars not writing about this? Why wasn't this more popularly known? Why weren't these texts included in my literature classes?

One could argue that the problem lies in an early scholarly dismissal of several Old Yiddish texts as bad reproductions of others in Middle or Early New High German. But the study of other, non-Yiddish, premodern literatures have blossomed despite such verdicts. Perhaps the problem is with the hybridity of this literature itself. Because of the detested and complicated status of the Yiddish language, it doesn't find a comfortable home in any one department, a problem exacerbated by the continued need for categorization that pervades the academic system in the German-speaking and Anglo-American worlds, despite all inter- and transdisciplinary efforts. (Israeli universities, with their departments of Yiddish, present an exception.) In the United States, experts in Old Yiddish are mostly faculty members of English or German(ic) departments (or their respective interdisciplinary departments or divisions) and are therefore knowledgeable about other areas of literature as well. (The Freie Universität Berlin was one of the first institutions to recognize the importance of this field for German Jewish cultural and literary history, creating a professorship for Old Yiddish, housed in the subfield of "Ältere deutsche Literatur und Sprache" at the Germanistik Department.) The problem of locating Old Yiddish in the academic landscape is rooted in its linguistic history as well as the ongoing debate about what is and what is not Jewish literature. In addition, we lack good modern editions and translations, although Jerold Frakes, in particular, has begun to remedy this challenge in the Anglophone world, by undertaking the enormous effort of making Old Yiddish material accessible through translations and scholarly guides. The existence of works such as a nonreligious Yiddish Arthurian romance, transmitted and transliterated in a Protestant *Teaching Book of Old Yiddish* from 1699, complicate the categorization of Old Yiddish literature.

To navigate this interdisciplinary field successfully as a student and now a faculty member, one needs advisors and mentors capable of embracing the inter- and

transdisciplinarity. I was lucky to count a number of such people among my teachers in graduate school, professors willing to share their wisdom and knowledge, including my dissertation adviser Ruth von Bernuth (herself an expert on Old Yiddish literature), Laura Lieber, Ann Marie Rasmussen, Katherine Starkey, and the late Jonathan Hess. It takes a village!

And here I turn to someone who was, in person, every bit as charming and insightful as Mark Twain, with whom I opened this essay. When I was invited to contribute an essay to “New Vistas in Jewish Studies,” one of the prompts encouraged me to reflect on what experiences in graduate school prepared us for our current jobs. Among many wonderful professors in the Carolina-Duke Graduate Program in German Studies, Jonathan Hess stands out. Some of my very first encounters with American-style doctoral programs are linked with a graduate class taught by Jonathan Hess, “German Culture & the Making of Modern Melodrama,” Jonathan always began his class with announcing a clear agenda and always managed to cover every single point despite letting us share all of our (not always incredibly lucid) ideas about the week’s readings. (This was no mean feat, taking into account that we were a very talkative, heterogeneous group of first- and second-year graduate students.) When it came to the final papers, Jonathan encouraged us to accept the imperfect, telling us that during his time in grad school he handed in papers that would be a disgrace to the profession. Despite some strong doubt about his statement, it represented much-needed wisdom that helped us manage the seemingly Herculean task of writing research papers due at the semester’s end. Coming from a German university setting, I found the idea of writing a term paper during the semester simply outrageous. Thanks to Jonathan’s encouragement and his precise and timely feedback, most of us not only finished our papers but were eventually able to turn them into conference presentations or articles. Jonathan’s succinct and lucid comments modeled for us the importance of mastering time management. (We graduate students used to joke that he responded to our emails before we sent them.) Shortly after this class, I was fortunate enough to be his teaching assistant in my first year in graduate school. Jonathan was the sort of professor who shared a lot of his teaching experience with his TAs. Seeing his seemingly perfect and intriguing signature class, “German Culture and the ‘Jewish Question,’” unfold flawlessly, the behind-the-scenes look he shared with us enabled us, at the start of our careers, to understand that every great class is based on a lot of



*Tripartite Mahzor, MS Kaufmann A384, fol. 103v, Kaufmann Collection, Oriental Library. By permission from Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest.*

unseen trial and error—a lesson that encouraged us to accept our own struggles as teachers as part of the process. Observing Jonathan taught me that kindness toward oneself and others has an immense impact and should be given more room in academia.

Jonathan mentored so many people and taught them how to be good professors, good researchers, and good human beings. He taught them how to be a person who cherishes intellectual challenges, but who also makes time for friends and family, for the things that really matter. I am truly indebted to Jonathan for his time, advice, expertise, and insights, and for his kindness. *Zekher Zaddik li-vrakhah.*

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**ANNEGRET OEHME** is assistant professor in the Department of Germanics at University of Washington. She received her PhD in 2016 in German from Duke and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (the joint Carolina-Duke Graduate Program in German Studies). Her research interests include medieval and early modern German and Yiddish literature and cultural transfers within a German Jewish context. She holds a BA in Jewish Studies and an MA in Medieval and Early Modern German Literature and Language from Freie Universität Berlin.

## Forum

# Five Decades of New Vistas

The past was once the present, the leading edge of the future—every bit as challenging, exciting, problematic, and full of promise as our own moment now. In this issue’s Forum, scholars representing every decade of the AJS reflect, critically and sympathetically, on their own histories with Jewish Studies and the AJS, not for nostalgia but to (re-)capture the forward momentum of a precise past moment. In some cases, these pieces describe the energy that moved the field forward, or recall emergent shifts in the field we now take for granted. Other essays draw our attention to tasks that remain unfinished and problems as yet unsolved. Every piece reminds us that, in fifty years, everything we are doing today will be part of an archive, and we cannot always be sure we know what is significant and what is ephemeral.

## 1968

### Reminiscence

Michael A. Meyer

זה הקטן גדול יהיה

In the fog-enshrouded distant past, somewhat over half a century ago, when no Association for Jewish Studies had yet been created—and there was still only a paucity of Jewish Studies within American universities—I agonized over what my freshly minted doctorate might enable me to procure. One could become a secular Hillel director (not all of them were rabbis) or perhaps find a nonacademic position in one or another Jewish organization. But that meant turning tail on the field and making all those papers and examinations into efforts for nought. I was fortunate that in 1964 HUC-JIR was expanding offerings at its new and very modest campus, nestled in the Hollywood Hills, and was eager



*Michael A. Meyer, circa 1960s.  
Courtesy of the author.*

for a Jewish historian. And so, initially, I could go west from the Queen City to the Los Angeles in which I had grown up.

Five years later the scene was changing rapidly but without direction. Given the surge in Jewish Studies prompted in part by ethnic and Black Studies and by donors

increasingly willing to honor their alma mater Jewishly, the historian Leon Jick called some forty-seven scholars, including one critical Israeli (Nathan Rotenstreich) and but a single woman (Lucy Dawidowicz), to a meeting at Brandeis University. At the end of our deliberations Joseph Blau suggested a national organization of Judaica scholars. Our concerns at that meeting and in the years immediately following were to provide a vehicle for bringing order into a chaotic development by extending guidance for the new phenomenon, arguing for high standards, bringing Jewish Studies to new venues, and establishing an exchange of scholarship through a journal and an annual conference. We wanted to break the monopoly held by the narrowly focused American Academy for Jewish Research and to open the field to younger scholars with novel scholarly concerns.

The first AJS meetings were modest in the extreme: the Harvard Faculty Club could easily accommodate us in those days; the journal appeared only once a year. Thinking back on that time, I am sure we believed our organization would have a long life, but we did not imagine how vastly it would grow. The complex, multifaceted, and well-ordered AJS approaching its fifty-year anniversary is a fulfillment far beyond the expectations of even its most optimistic founders.

**MICHAEL A. MEYER** is the Adolph S. Ochs Professor of Jewish History emeritus at Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati. He is the author, among other works, of *Origins of the Modern Jew* (Wayne State, 1967) and *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Oxford, 1988).

## There Are the Beginnings

Eric Meyers

In thinking back about the founding of the AJS fifty years ago I am reminded of how lucky I have been in my career. I started out at Brandeis studying modern Jewish thought but Nahum Glatzer, then chairman of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies, told me that I had to do a bit of everything in order to qualify to teach Judaic Studies one day. That included Biblical Studies, Second Temple, Rabbinics, Zionism, Jewish History in all periods, and even Jewish Art and Archaeology, because E. R. Goodenough was there in those days. And I followed his advice to be a generalist and a specialist. At first I thought I would stay in German Jewish thought but along the way I fell in love with

Hebrew Bible, Archaeology, and Second Temple Studies. I also met my future wife, Carol, while there—she was at Wellesley—and so I combined Biblical Studies and archaeological work. For Glatzer it was simply unthinkable for anyone who wanted to teach Judaic Studies to lack mastery of the full chronological range of Jewish subjects that s/he might have to teach one day. This advice has been central to my life as a teacher and scholar and as a founder of two Jewish Studies programs, one at Duke and one at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (originally a joint program with Duke in the 1970s). I don't think many new PhDs today would want to accept this generalist advice, but it has served me well.

Even though I went on to Harvard to pursue a PhD in Biblical Archaeology, as quad masters at Brandeis University, Carol and I were very much part of campus life there in the tumultuous 1960s. Jack Neusner had been a recent postdoc at Brandeis working with Goodenough; he subsequently moved to Dartmouth and then to Brown in 1968, and it was around this time that there was talk about founding a Jewish Studies society. Because I had been a long-time friend of Jack—he was a JTS classmate of my late uncle Rabbi Marshall Meyer—Jack involved me in discussions and planning of the nascent AJS. Charles Berlin, Judaica librarian at Harvard, and Marvin Fox of Brandeis also were key local movers and shakers, along with many others, in getting the AJS started. I gave a paper at that first meeting in Boston on the relationship between Archaeology and Jewish Studies and used as my prime example Michael Avi-Yonah.

Nationwide at that time there were so few of us qualified to teach Judaic Studies that I had no trouble getting a job. In fact, I was offered several jobs without an on-campus interview at well-known institutions. But it was love at first sight after my campus interview at Duke and I have been there ever since. My Harvard teachers were the ones who more-or-less insisted I accept Duke because Frank Cross and Ernest Wright thought I could play a major role in the graduate program, which I hope I have. As for the undergraduate teaching, Glatzer's advice carried me for decades and some of my most popular courses through the years have been in areas that are not my specialty. I think Jewish Studies could benefit from a bit of that wisdom today.

**ERIC MEYERS** is Bernice and Morton Lerner Emeritus Professor in Jewish Studies at Duke University. Among his most recent publications are *Alexander to Constantine: Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, vol. 3, with Mark Chancey* (Yale, 2012) and *the final reports on Sepphoris* (Eisenbrauns at Penn State Press, 2018). He has served three times as president of the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR) and on the AJS Board during its early years.

## 1978

### New Voices

Marsha Rozenblit

I began attending the annual meetings of the AJS in the mid-1970s when I was a graduate student in Jewish History at Columbia. It was enormously exciting to attend the AJS in those years. Jewish Studies was growing as

an academic field, but the conferences were still small and intimate, and graduate students, junior faculty, and the giants of the field were jointly creating a dynamic new area of academic exploration. Because the conference was small, with at most two sessions in every time slot, we attended sessions outside of our own field and got to know both those fields and the scholars who worked in them. I was in History, but I came to know the work of scholars in Bible, Rabbinics, Hebrew and Yiddish Literature, and Sociology, and I became friends with many of them, whether they were in my age cohort or not. I miss those days, and I regret that the very success of Jewish Studies means that now I rarely attend sessions outside of my own field of Modern Jewish History.

Naturally we scholars of Jewish Studies in the 1970s felt that we employed cutting-edge approaches. In my own field, many of us became social historians, studying not the rabbinic elite or great intellectual or political figures, but ordinary people. Some of us (like me) turned to cliometrics, that is, using the computer to analyze birth, marriage, school registration, communal membership, and tax records in order to study the behavior of people who only appeared in the historical record through such records. We used the published and unpublished memoirs of ordinary people who had lived through extraordinary times. As a result, we could open up new fields, including, perhaps especially, women's history. In those days, before the fall of Communism and the collapse of the Soviet Union, it was still extraordinarily difficult to study the Jews in Eastern Europe (although some intrepid souls did so), but as soon as

it was possible in the early 1990s, many historians rushed to the long-neglected archives of Eastern Europe to study the creative Jewish communities that had lived there. We thus not only used new methodologies, but we turned to new areas of study.

I am grateful that I came of age as a scholar when I did, and I am proud of the fact that Jewish Studies continues to be a vibrant field of academic inquiry.

**MARSHA ROZENBLIT** is the Harvey M. Meyerhoff Professor of Modern Jewish History at the University of Maryland, where she has been on the faculty since 1978. She is the author of *The Jews of Vienna, 1867–1918: Assimilation and Identity* (SUNY, 1983) and *Reconstructing a National Identity: The Jews of Habsburg Austria during World War I* (Oxford, 2001). She has also coedited (with Pieter Judson) *Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe* (Berghahn Books, 2005) and (with Jonathan Karp) *World War I and the Jews: Conflict and Transformation in Europe, the Middle East, and America* (Berghahn Books, 2017), and written over thirty articles on the Jews of the Habsburg Empire. She served as president of the AJS from 2009 to 2011.

### **A Place at the (Conference) Table**

Ellen M. Umansky

Looking back at the program from the 1978 AJS conference, I was surprised to discover that it easily fit on the front and back of a single piece of paper. I did remember, however, that there weren't many session options, most were on topics



*Ellen M. Umansky, circa 1970s.  
Courtesy of the author.*

in which I had little interest, and less than a handful of papers focused on the lives of Jewish women. From the time I started attending AJS conferences in the mid-1970s, until a few years after the founding of the Women's Caucus in 1986, I felt like an outsider. There were few women registered, either as attendees or as presenters, and most of the men who were there, including those I knew, with few exceptions, primarily talked to one another.

In 1978, such fields of Gender Studies and Queer Theory had not yet emerged. Women's Studies had, yet despite titles that promised greater inclusivity, most of the papers at the conference that year ignored women's roles and contributions. Indeed, the notable exception, as at AJS conferences for the next several decades, was a separate session on women. In 1978, that session was "Women and Female Imagery in Jewish Literature." Serendipitously, there was a session that year on "Anglo-Jewish History in the Post-Emancipation Period" in which I was selected to be one of four presenters. My paper on "The Origins of the Liberal Jewish

Movement in England” primarily focused on Lily Montagu’s role as founder of the movement, although deliberately or not, I didn’t mention her in the title of my paper. It would be a year or two later before I began to undertake a gendered analysis of the late nineteenth-century Anglo-Jewish community. The material I presented at the 1978 conference was “new” and my perspective distinctly feminist, yet I would hardly call my paper cutting edge, as the writing of my dissertation was still in its early stages. The truth is, I don’t remember any of the papers at the conference being cutting edge. Many topics were innovative, yet safe. That the 1978 conference was held in the same city (Boston) in which it had been held since the AJS’s founding, and where it continued to be held for decades after, underscores the fact that even as it celebrated its tenth annual conference, the AJS still had a long way to go before its conferences encouraged intellectual boldness, acknowledged the geographical diversity of attendees, and welcomed the active participation of women.

**ELLEN M. UMANSKY** is the Carl and Dorothy Bennett Professor of Judaic Studies at Fairfield University. The author of numerous essays, book chapters, and reviews on modern Jewish history and thought, and on women in Judaism, she is also the author of two books on Lily Montagu, founder of the Liberal Jewish movement in England; coeditor (with Dianne Ashton) of *Four Centuries of Jewish Women’s Spirituality: A Source Book* (Beacon, 1992, rev. ed. UPNE, 2009) and *From Christian Science to Jewish Science: Spiritual Healing and American Jews* (Oxford, 2005).

## 1988

### Gender Consciousness

Judith R. Baskin

In 1988 I attended the twentieth annual conference of the Association for Jewish Studies, held, as always in those years, at the Copley Plaza Hotel in Boston. I delivered a paper, “The Education of Girls in Medieval Jewish Society,” in a panel entitled, “The Experiences of Medieval and Renaissance Jewish Women”; it also included presentations by Judith Dishon, Cheryl Tallan, and Howard Tzvi Adelman. We, and like-minded colleagues, were present at the beginning of modern scholarly study of Jewish women and it was an exciting and heady time. Our endeavor was still beyond the purview of most of the men who dominated the field in 1988. The advent of gender analysis within the various subdisciplines of Jewish Studies is unmentioned in the reflections of past presidents on “The Cutting Edge of the Study of Judaica,” delivered at the conference and published in the *AJS Newsletter* of Spring 1989. The



Judith R. Baskin, 1995.  
Courtesy of the author.

panel in which I participated was one of four devoted to women; the other three addressed aspects of women in rabbinic literature and in American Jewish life and culture. The program describes one of these panels, which focused on life-cycle events, oral histories, literature, and film as sources for studying Jewish women, as offered “in conjunction with” the Women’s Caucus of the AJS. Yet, the Women’s Caucus, founded in 1986, is otherwise missing from the program; it was not considered part of the AJS because at that time it limited membership to women (see Rachael Kamel’s article on the Paula Hyman Oral Project in *Nashim* 27, 2014). The 1988 conference stands out for me because it was when the Caucus held its first breakfast meeting, under its own organizational auspices. Now the AJS Women’s Caucus’s annual public event, the breakfast had an affirming debut, signaling the arrival of a safe and empowering place for female scholars and for scholarship about women, men, and the constraints and expressions of gender.

**JUDITH R. BASKIN**, *Philip H. Knight Professor of Humanities Emerita, University of Oregon*, was cochair of the AJS Women’s Caucus from 1989–91 and president of the AJS from 2004–06.

### Globalization

Yael Zerubavel

As the AJS approaches its fiftieth anniversary, it can note the remarkable changes within the organization and the field of Jewish Studies and the challenges ahead. Thirty years ago, when it marked its twentieth anniversary, the AJS had already witnessed a significant growth of Jewish Studies in the American

academy yet faced lingering concerns about its marginal position relative to the Israeli academy and the future development of Jewish Studies.

As a young scholar and an Israeli who had just received her PhD from the University of Pennsylvania and was working in the area of Israeli cultural history, I first arrived at the AJS annual conference in 1981. I do not have membership figures to support my impression during this first encounter, but as a newcomer I remember feeling unsure that I belonged to that scene where most participants seemed to be male and trained in more traditional Jewish scholarship. Within several years, rapid changes in the field turned me from a marginal member to an active participant, then a board member, of the society that became my main academic home base.

In the past three decades, the proliferation of programs and academic centers of Jewish Studies in American universities as well as English-language journals and book series dramatically diminished the sense of marginality of American scholars of Jewish Studies and brought larger and more diversified membership to the AJS. Contact between global centers of Jewish Studies has intensified as American and European students of Jewish Studies go to Israel, while Israeli students go abroad to pursue higher degrees. The growth in postdoctoral fellowships and visiting scholar positions in the field further accelerated this process. While Israel has remained an important center of learning, developments within the European and American academy have influenced Israeli universities, introducing new theoretical perspec-

tives and methodological approaches to the study of Jewish texts, Jewish history, and contemporary communities and their cultures. A stronger emphasis on interdisciplinary and comparative approaches to Jewish Studies has similarly reinforced closer scholarly ties with other academic fields as well as global networks focused on specific areas of expertise across the geographical and disciplinary divides. The field of Israel Studies provides a prominent example for these new academic trends. Created by American scholars and first viewed with suspicion by their Israeli colleagues, Israel Studies has become part of the Israeli academic landscape, with its own international association, journals, and programs.

Nonetheless, we may have reached the point where the expansion of Jewish Studies has reached its peak; given the recent decline in the humanities within the academy, we are currently faced with concerns about sustaining the present for the sake of the future.

**Yael Zerubavel** is professor of *Jewish Studies and History at Rutgers, and the author of Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition (University of Chicago Press, 1995) and Desert in the Promised Land (Stanford University Press, 2018). She has served on the boards of the AJS and the Association for Israel Studies.*

## 1998

### It Was Twenty Years Ago Today ...

Aryeh Cohen

It is striking to me that of the two sessions I participated in at the thirtieth annual AJS conference, three of the eight scholars who presented along with me have now passed away. Of the three, Bonna Dvora Haberman was the one that I knew in more than a passing fashion. While I do not recall the specific paper she delivered, I do remember her larger project, which was what she then called a praxis hermeneutic—a feminist interpretation of text through action. I also remember Bonna's smile, her intelligence, the confidence with which she would come into a room. She was trying to do something hard. We often ended up on the same panel at the AJS or the AAR-SBL conferences, often in rooms too big for the panel, where optimism outweighed attendance. She was called to study in the *yeshivah shel ma'alah* in 2015 after a long battle with cancer, and many accomplishments.

I was very proud of the paper I gave that year ("This Patriarchy Which Is Not One: The Ideology of Marriage in Rashi and Tosafot"), and having spied Professor Chaim Soloveitchik in the audience, I tentatively went over to him after the session and asked him what he thought. I was very gratified by the fact that he did not pronounce it *drivel*. He even grudgingly seemed to approve. I was very taken with the project of a feminist hermeneutics, and committed to the fanciful idea that interpretive technique and textual analysis might be politically redemptive. I am still committed to the idea of mixing

the street and the seminar room within the interpretation of texts, which perhaps draws me closer to Bonna Haberman's project.

From the panel on midrash that I chaired, Ben Zion Wacholder and Aaron Panken have since passed away. Wacholder died after a long career and interesting life, *besevah tovah*, at the age of eighty-seven in 2011. Aaron Panken tragically died this year in a plane crash at the age of fifty-three. I, unfortunately, did not know either of them very well.

In 1998, the AJS, while still in Boston, was spreading its wings. As a graduate student at Brandeis I first attended the AJS conference in the Copley Plaza, which, in my memory, sported a two-story-tall Christmas tree in the lobby, and a modest attendance of mainly black-suited men and a smattering of black-suited women. It felt, in 1998, like the field of Jewish Studies was on the brink of something new. It still does.

**ARYEH COHEN** is professor of *Rabbinic Literature at the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies of the American Jewish University. His latest book is Justice in the City: An Argument from the Sources of Rabbinic Judaism (Academic Studies Press, 2013).*

## The Margins

Susan L. Einbinder

What were the "new vistas" of Jewish Studies scholarship twenty years ago? Were they reflected in the AJS conference in 1998 and how have they fared since? In 1998, when we still regularly convened in Boston, participation heavily weighted to the Eastern Seaboard and Israel. Today,

certainly, Jewish Studies thrives across a broader geography and multiple centers of influence. The same fissure between text and sociological topics endures, the same preoccupation with questions of identity, Holocaust, and Israel. In 1998, "gender" meant women, while today that rubric commands a much more sophisticated and variegated view. In 1998, Kabbalah and mysticism were lightly represented, and history of science, magic, or medicine not at all; today, these areas have gained considerable traction. Of the four of us who joined in 1998 for a session on medieval penitential themes, we have each evolved from our 1998 concerns. Most of our interests have remained peripheral to trending themes: no new wave of interest has buoyed studies of medieval Jewish preaching; or cultural contextualization of piyyut; or late medieval *maqāma*. Karaism has fared slightly better. In 1998, the plenary speaker, Natalie Zemon Davis, exhorted us to move past the binaries that characterized so much of our scholarship: contemporary or vernacular versus classical, secular versus religious, tradition versus modernity. Ironically, the conference program illustrates how deeply invested in those binaries Jewish Studies scholarship was. Twenty years later, those binaries remain a challenge, and "Jewish Studies" can seem a conglomerate of subspecialties that do not speak to each other and have increasingly become more balkanized from other academic disciplines and questions. This is true when the most promising work I read is richly interdisciplinary, in service neither to identity politics nor to a small group of power brokers. Where next, who knows? Today's young scholars will tell us.

**SUSAN L. EINBINDER** is professor of *Hebrew and Judaic Studies at the University of Connecticut and a Fellow of the Medieval Academy of America. Her most recent monograph is After the Black Death: Plague and Commemoration among Iberian Jews (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).*

## From Strength to Strength

Adena Tanenbaum

By 1998, the AJS had undergone several metamorphoses since its earliest days in the Harvard Faculty Club. As the new millennium approached, the ten-member Program Committee included four women, and conference sessions



Adena Tanenbaum, circa 1990s.  
Courtesy of the author.

were recorded on audio cassettes. But membership had burgeoned, and the association was far more inclusive and pluralist, both demographically and in the range of disciplines and critical methodologies it embraced. Alongside more traditional frameworks of inquiry, the conceptual tools of Gender Studies were being applied to Bible, exegesis, Rabbinics, liturgy, Holocaust Studies, and theology; considerations of race, class, and gender were being explored in

sessions on cultural and personal identities; and ethnographic perspectives were being brought to bear on Jewish law and narrative. Though textual studies were very much in evidence, there was also a move beyond the purely textual to engage with questions of orality, expressions of sacred time and space, artistic representation, and performance. But there were still significant lacunae; particularly underrepresented were the diverse Jewish subcultures of the Islamic world.

In the intervening years, those subcultures have gained greater visibility. Yet, my own area of research—premodern Yemenite Jewry—is still quite peripheral to Jewish Studies outside of Israel. Over more than a millennium, Yemenite Jewry has expressed itself in poetic, halakhic, philosophical, exegetical, and kabbalistic texts; in distinctive ritual, liturgical, and educational practices; in oral performance; folklore; material culture—manuscripts, costume, jewelry, and metalwork; in dance; women’s song, poetry, and childbirth rites; in messianic movements; with social, economic, and political agency, both internally and externally within the broader Jewish world, and as a *dhimmi* community vis-à-vis the dominant Muslim society; and more recently with a reassertion of its Arab Jewish identity. Many of these facets have been treated descriptively, but the analytical tools of ethnography, Gender and Postcolonial Studies are also being fruitfully applied. In this milestone year, which also marks the four-hundredth anniversary of Shalom Shabbazi, it is worth reiterating that the rich legacies of premodern Mizrahi communities are deserving of serious study. As the

AJS continues to innovate and broaden its canvas while responding to significant changes in the humanities, there are still fertile fields of endeavor to integrate.

ילכו מחיל אל חיל! - May they go from strength to strength!

**ADENA TANENBAUM** is associate professor of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures at the Ohio State University. Her book, *The Contemplative Soul: Hebrew Poetry and Philosophical Theory in Medieval Spain* (Brill, 2002), was a 2003 Koret Foundation Jewish Book Award finalist (Philosophy / Thought). She has published on medieval Hebrew poetry and belles lettres, and is completing a monograph on Zechariah Aldahiri’s maqāma, *Sefer hamusar* (Yemen, sixteenth century).

## 2008

### Still Timely Flora Cassen

The AJS conference in 2008 was my first one with a PhD in hand and as a freshly minted assistant professor at the University of Vermont. It was the first time that I did not have to ask my advisor for a letter in order to submit a paper proposal. It was exciting, and on my way out of Burlington, I ran into a colleague who said: “Wear your UVM badge proudly”; I certainly did. Leaving through the 2008 program, it is nice to see that many friends and colleagues are still around and active. Ten years later, we still meet for lunches and drinks and continue to enjoy each other’s intellectual and social company.

As I continue to read through the program, it also strikes me that the

AJS and its scholars have not lost their edge or focus. What we were studying ten years ago is in many cases still relevant. There were panels on antisemitism (in history and on university campuses), on the many varieties and permutations of Jewish identity, on Jewish languages and literatures, multilingualism and translation, and global Diaspora(s), on anything Israel related, on Jews and nationalism and Jewish nationalism. I could go on, but my point is that many of these themes are being discussed today with renewed vigor



Flora Cassen, circa 2008.  
Courtesy of the author.

in a wide variety of academic fields, and even outside of academia. It is common to hear that Jewish Studies is a step behind other fields regarding new trends, however, the program of the AJS in 2008 suggests on the contrary that many of the “traditional” questions in Jewish Studies have become increasingly useful to understanding our current times.

In 2008, my field of Italian Early Modern Studies was debating Ariel Toaff’s *Pasque di sangue*. In a panel devoted to the book, scholars not only reaffirmed the utter falseness of the claim that Jews ritually murdered Christian children, they also

### 1998 Program Committee

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Christine Hayes	Yale University
Paula Hyman	Yale University
Marsha Rozenblit	University of Maryland
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Elliot Wolfson	New York University
Sharon H. Flatto	Yale University ( <i>student member</i> )
	<i>ex officio</i>
David Berger	Brooklyn College, <i>AJS President</i>
Aaron L. Katchen	<i>Executive Secretary, AJS</i>

*From the Thirtieth Annual Conference of the Association for Jewish Studies program book, 1998.*

discussed the ins and outs of primary source analysis, especially testimonies obtained under torture, different theoretical frameworks, and the responsibilities of historians. In light of the recent rise in antisemitism and other hatreds, and talk of fake news and cherry-picking facts, this is another example of how prescient and relevant our work was and is.

**FLORA CASSEN** is associate professor of History and JMA and Sonja Van der Horst Scholar in Jewish History and Culture, both at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her research focuses on the history of Jews in early modern Italy, Spain, and the Mediterranean. She is the author of *Marking the Jews in Renaissance Italy: Politics, Religion, and the Power of Symbols* (Cambridge, 2017).

### Not Just a “Women’s Issue”

Beth S. Wenger

The opening pages of the 2008 AJS conference program contain a short paragraph about childcare services available to conference participants.

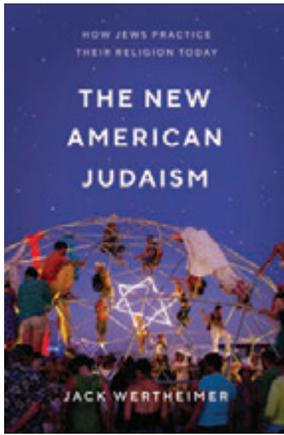
The initiative, as the conference program emphatically declares, was not sponsored by or affiliated in any way with the AJS but rather supported independently by the Center for Cultural Judaism. For many years, different private foundations subsidized the childcare program. By contrast, in 2018, childcare stands as a regular budget line in AJS conference planning.

The impetus to provide childcare at the conference began in the AJS Women’s Caucus, spearheaded by a group of Caucus members who, on their own initiative, successfully garnered the funding needed to make it a reality. In those years, the childcare effort emerged as one of the key projects of the Women’s Caucus, though its members recognized that it was not, in fact, solely a “women’s issue,” but one that fell disproportionately on young women scholars. It is no coincidence that childcare became part of the AJS agenda as former leaders and cochairs of the Women’s Caucus assumed greater roles in the leadership of the organization. At the same time, childcare services involved a complex matrix of financial and liability considerations, and required delicate negoti-

ations that extended beyond the desire to support parents attending the conference. In many ways, the question of offering childcare revealed the contested terrain of an organization grappling with inclusion as it struggled with its own economic challenges.

Many members might argue that today childcare provisions could be improved, as remains the case in many academic organizations. But certainly the evolution over ten years is striking. Providing childcare allows all parents to attend conference sessions, and to have access to all the opportunities for intellectual exchange and socialization so crucial to professional advancement, particularly at the early-career stages. Moreover, childcare services benefit the organization as a whole by allowing the contributions of individuals who might otherwise not be able to participate. In many respects, the issue of childcare reveals the strides made toward greater inclusivity in the AJS as it seeks to serve a more diverse and growing membership.

**BETH S. WENGER** is Moritz and Josephine Berg Professor of History and chair of the History Department at the University of Pennsylvania. Her books include *History Lessons: The Creation of American Jewish Heritage* (Princeton University Press, 2010), *New York Jews and the Great Depression: Uncertain Promise* (Yale University Press, 1996), and *The Jewish Americans: Three Centuries of Jewish Voices in America* (Doubleday, 2007). Wenger is a former cochair of the AJS Women’s Caucus.



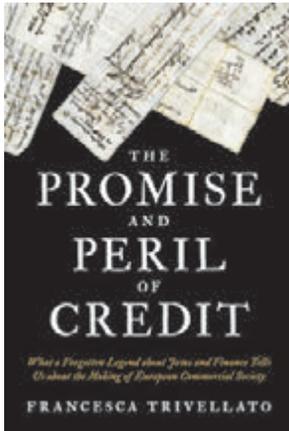
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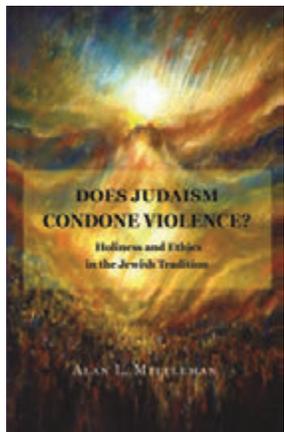
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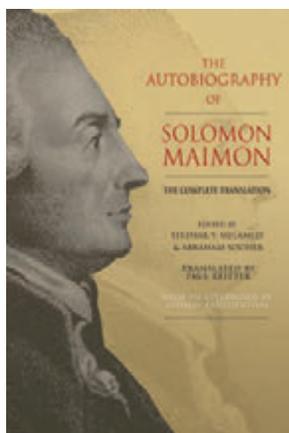
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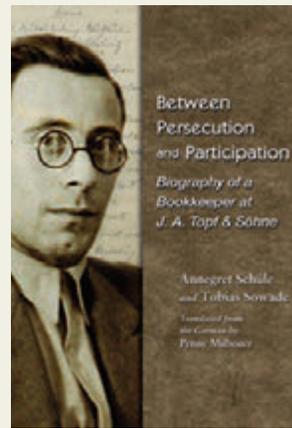
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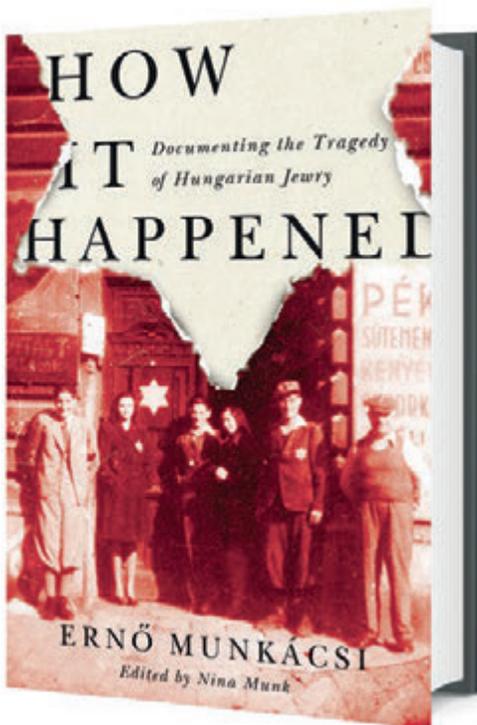
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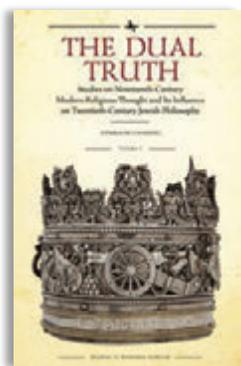
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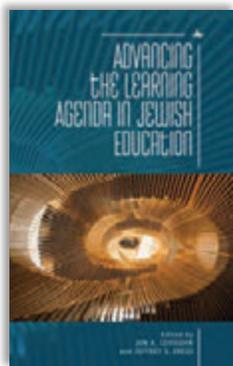
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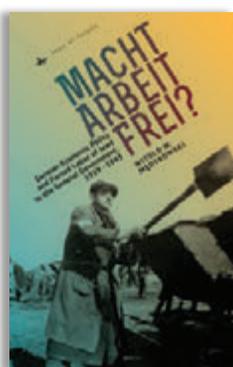
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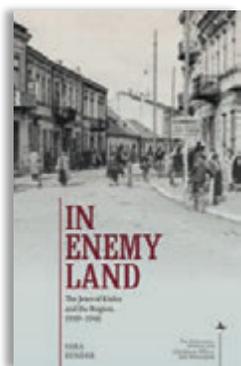
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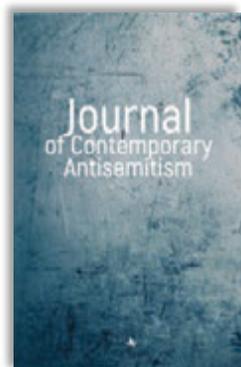
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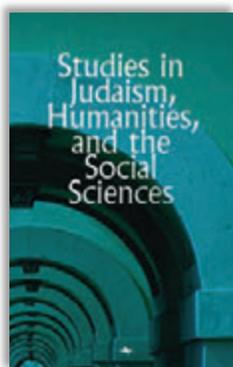
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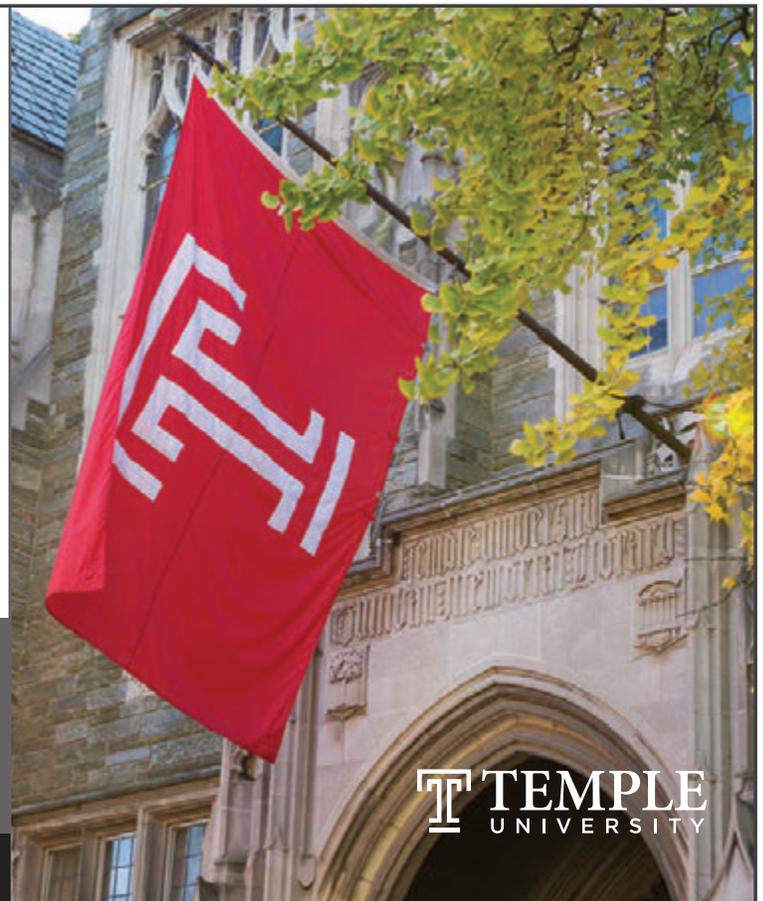
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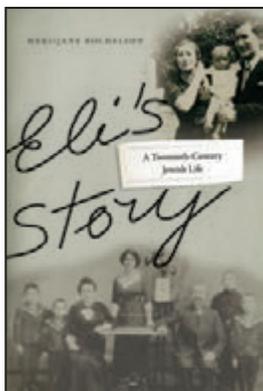
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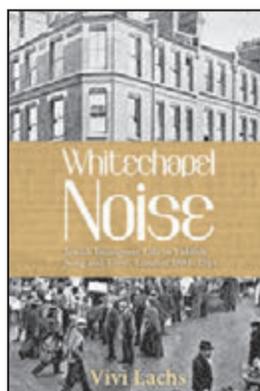


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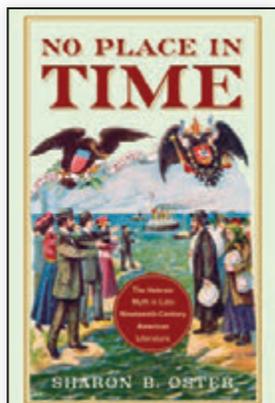
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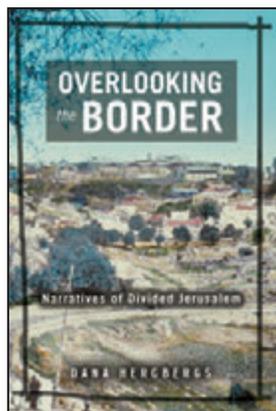
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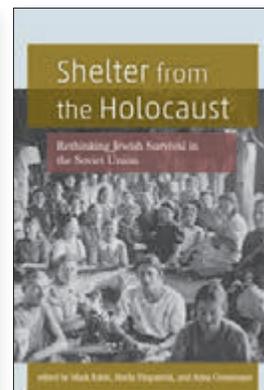
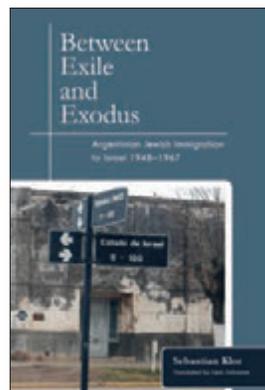
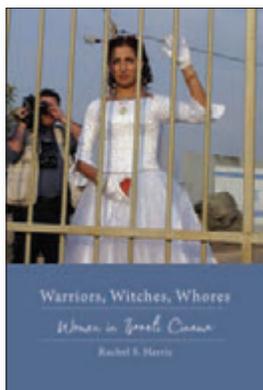
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A photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a dark blue t-shirt and a white tallit (prayer shawl) with blue stripes. She is looking down and smiling slightly. A metal cage is suspended around her neck, with a white string or thread passing through it. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

*Tamar Paley,  
HA'MAVDIL & BETWEEN SACRED  
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Photo: Ya Studio*

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## INTRODUCING BENJAMIN ZUSKIN

Ala Zuskin  
Perelman



Benjamin Zuskin (1899 – 1952), one of the greatest Jewish actors, was starring at the Moscow Yiddish Theater, and as member of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, was executed by firing squad in Stalin's Russia.

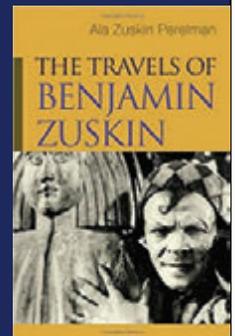
*Benjamin Zuskin... happens to personify the principal traits of his epoch, his art, and his people (Joshua Rubenstein, Harvard University).*

I, Zuskin's daughter, have written a book, *The Travels of Benjamin Zuskin* – published in Russian (2002), Hebrew (2006), and English (Syracuse University Press, 2015).

*The book offers a chance to learn about this chapter in the history of 20th-century Jewish culture. (Mikhael Handelzalts, critic, Israel).*

*Without this book no study of the subject can make headway (Gennady Estraikh, New York University).*

*It is something unique, a story, an essay, an epic, a tragedy and a comedy and a history. It is a gift to the generations to come (Antonio Attisani, University of Torino, Italy).*



More information could be found in my website: [alazuskinperelman.com](http://alazuskinperelman.com)

To all the AJS members, and especially to those from the academic circles, I am introducing a unique man, and through him, quite a significant raise-and-fall story which is worth to become an integral part of Jewish Studies, and to be included in teaching plans, lectures, speeches, discussions, and research.

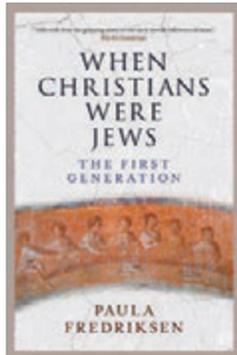


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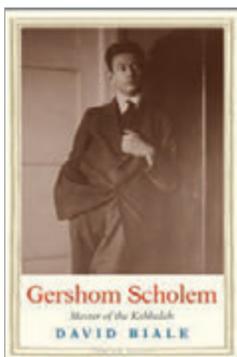
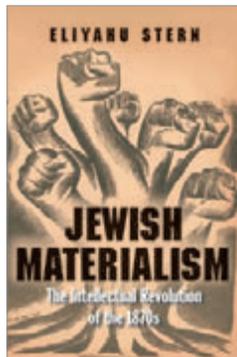
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In order to, 1) encourage projects of academic collaboration between Jewish studies programs (or faculty) between two or more institutions, either in the same city or in cities in close geographical proximity to each other, Or, 2) enable collaborative scholarly endeavors that would not otherwise receive funding, AAJR will support several special initiatives with modest grants. Examples of projects that will be considered for support are ongoing, theme-focused seminars or workshops open to faculty and graduate students from the participating programs. Graduate-student-driven projects (under faculty supervision) will also be considered for funding.

The maximum amount to be awarded to any project will be \$5,000. The grant may be used to subsidize the travel of participants (when the institutions are in different cities), to bring in speakers from outside the participating institutions, and to pay project-related administrative costs.

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Applications should include a detailed description of the project, as well as a budget, a letter from the head of the relevant department, program, or center indicating approval of the project, and the name of one reference.

Funding is intended only for faculty and graduate students at North American universities.

Please submit applications on-line via email to Cheri Thompson, administrator of the American Academy for Jewish Research, at [aajr.office@gmail.com](mailto:aajr.office@gmail.com).

The deadline for applications is February 4, 2019. Recipients of grants will be notified by May 2019.

For questions or further information regarding this program, please contact Professor Marsha Rozenblit, Chair of the review committee at [mrozenbl@umd.edu](mailto:mrozenbl@umd.edu).

# AAJR AMERICAN ACADEMY FOR JEWISH RESEARCH GRADUATE RESEARCH FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

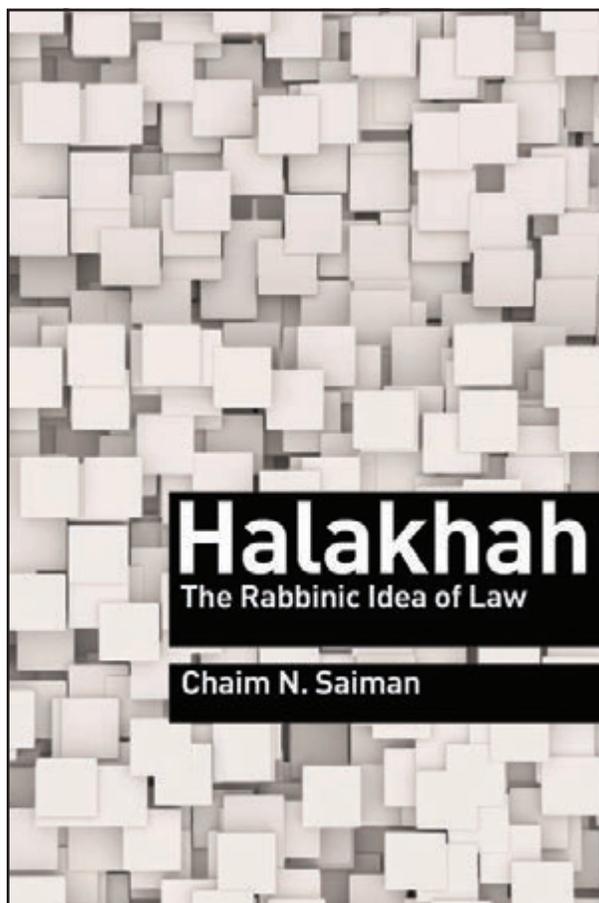
AAJR announces a grant for graduate student summer research funding. We will provide several stipends of no more than \$4,000 to graduate students in any field of Jewish Studies. The funds are not intended for language study or purchase of equipment.

**Eligibility:** Graduate students in any field of Jewish studies at a North American university who have submitted their prospectus and can demonstrate a need to travel to collections may apply for funding.

## Required for Application:

1. A curriculum vitae, a proposal, of no more than five pages that includes intended research travel (i.e. collections to be consulted, sites to be visited) and an itemized budget with indication of other sources of summer support applied for or available. Applicants should notify us if they receive other summer grants.
2. A letter of recommendation from the applicant's principal advisor. The advisor should indicate whether the applicant's university provides support for summer research and on what terms.

All materials should be submitted online to Cheri Thompson at [aajr.office@gmail.com](mailto:aajr.office@gmail.com) by February 1, 2019. For questions and further information, please contact Professor Deborah Dash Moore, Chair of the review committee at [ddmoore@umich.edu](mailto:ddmoore@umich.edu). Awards will be announced in mid-April 2019.



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The Fellow will be expected to be in residence, to conduct research in Yale's library and archival collections, to participate actively in the intellectual life of the university, teach two courses, one per year, with the option of substituting the organization of a conference, seminar, or colloquium for the second year's course.

*The annual stipend will be \$59,000 plus health benefits.*

Candidates can apply by email to – [renee.reed@yale.edu](mailto:renee.reed@yale.edu) or send a cover letter, CV, project proposal, two letters of recommendation, and a list of proposed courses to:

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**Judaic Studies**

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*The annual stipend will be \$59,000 plus health benefits.*

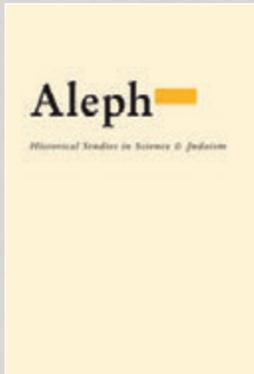
Candidates can apply by email to – [renee.reed@yale.edu](mailto:renee.reed@yale.edu) or send a cover letter, CV, project proposal, three letters of recommendation, and a list of proposed courses to:

**Judaic Studies Program**  
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**The deadline for receipt of application materials is February 4, 2019.**

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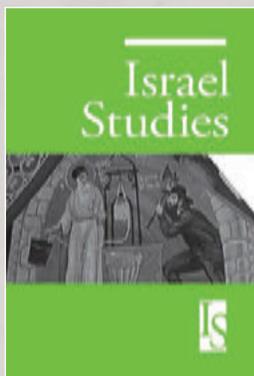
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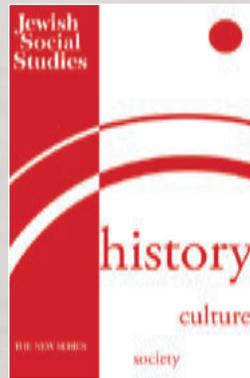
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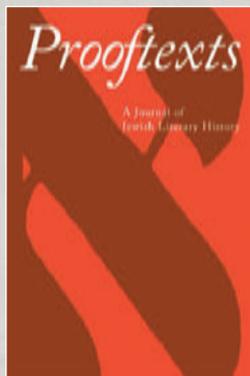


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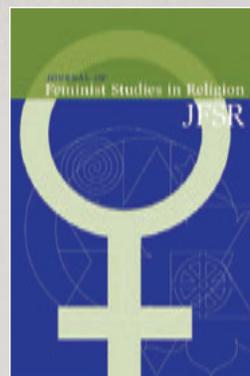
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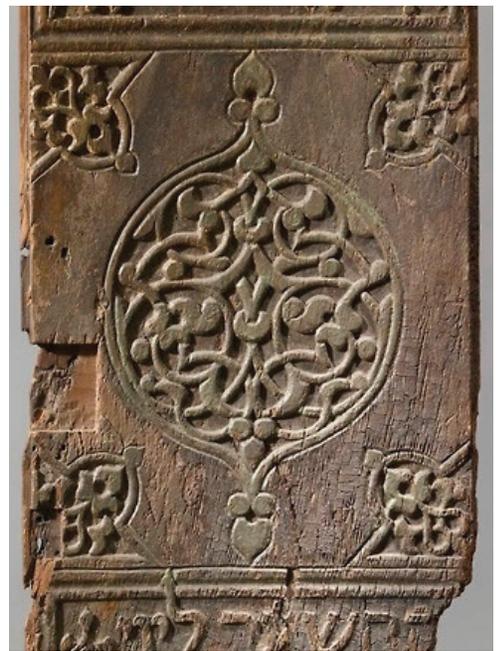
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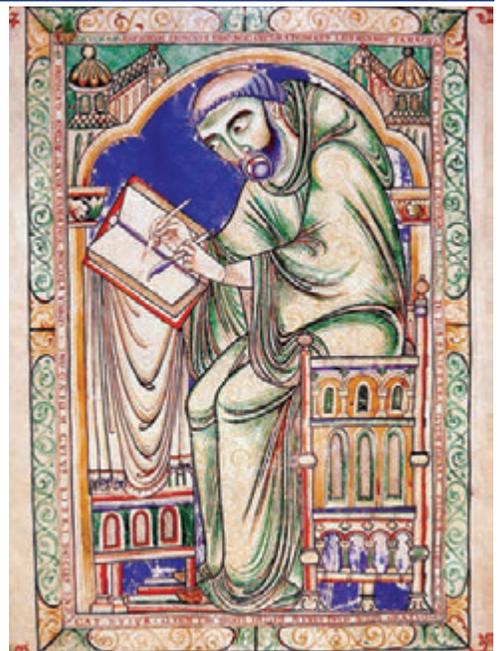
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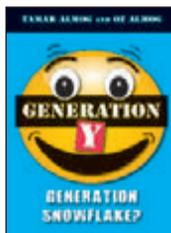
The Leo Baeck Institute is offering a Career Development Award as a personal grant to a scholar or professional in an early career stage, e.g. before gaining tenure in an academic institution or its equivalent, whose proposed work would deal with topics within the Leo Baeck Institute's mission, namely historical or cultural issues of the Jewish experience in German-speaking lands.

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Applications outlining the nature and scope of the proposed project including a budget should be submitted, in no more than two pages, by March 1, 2019 to Dr. Frank Mecklenburg, Leo Baeck Institute, 15 West 16th St. New York 10011, NY. A curriculum vitae, three letters of references, and supporting material (outline of proposed work, draft of chapters, previous publications) should be appended. e-mail submission to [fmecklenburg@lbi.cjh.org](mailto:fmecklenburg@lbi.cjh.org) is encouraged.

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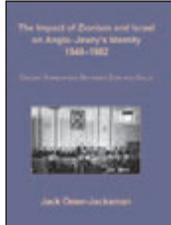
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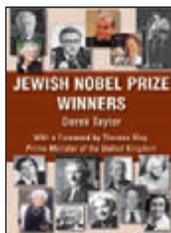
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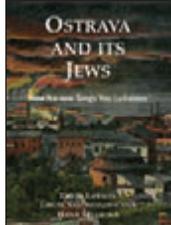
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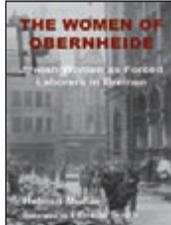
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