

# AJS PERSPECTIVES

*The Newsletter of the Association for Jewish Studies*



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CORRECTION: We apologize for an error made in the Fall 2004 issue of *AJS Perspectives* in which the obituary of our distinguished colleague Abraham Joseph Karp was mistakenly titled Joseph Karp. We are reprinting the obituary in this issue with Rabbi Karp's name correctly printed.

*AJS Perspectives* encourages submissions of articles, announcements, and brief letters to the editor related to the interests of our members. Materials submitted will be published at the discretion of the editors. *AJS Perspectives* reserves the right to reject articles, announcements, letters, advertisements, and other items not consonant with the goals and purposes of the organization. Copy may be condensed or rejected because of length or style. *AJS Perspectives* disclaims responsibility for statements made by contributors or advertisers.

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# FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Colleagues,

The spring issue of *Perspectives* invites you to read about emerging fields in Jewish studies. Both our feature on Sephardic and Middle Eastern Jewry and the article on teaching about Jews through media raise fundamental questions about traditional narratives of Jewish culture and history.

Jonathan Decter and Matt Goldish contacted *Perspectives* about creating a feature on Sephardic studies. I thank them both for working with me on formulating a section that would allow our colleagues who teach Jewish history to think about ways to integrate this field into their classroom narratives. I particularly thank Jonathan Decter, a member of our editorial board, who assumed an important leadership role for the section over the past month.

The articles on the study of and teaching about Sephardic and Middle Eastern Jewry allow us to rethink some of the key assumptions and paradigms about Jewish experience. These authors not only question how Sephardic and Mizrahi (Eastern) Jews have been portrayed in Jewish history; they underline the complexity and diversity of Jewish responses to such matters as colonialism, modernity, and Jewish practice.

This issue's focus on Sephardic and Middle Eastern Jewish studies is *Perspectives's* third feature on a field within Jewish studies in as many years. Previously featured fields were Israel studies and German Jewish studies. The spatial dimension of these fields is striking. As scholars, we appear to be challenging traditional narratives of Jewish history and assumptions about the nature of Jewish beliefs and practices by rethinking where those cultures developed.

Our pedagogy article by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Jeffrey Shandler is no less radical a comment on Jewish studies than our feature on Sephardim and Mizrahim. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Shandler spearheaded the section devoted to Jews and media in an important project at New York University on religion and media funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts. Their article describes the questions they have raised over the past year with a working group and includes their Web site, which offers teaching modules. The scope of this project is particularly impressive, and its questions about the ways in which Judaism and Jewish life can be read through media are especially exciting.

Heidi Lerner's regular technology feature is nothing short of a gift to scholars. She has provided very helpful information about how to access digitized sources such as sound recordings, e-books, and documents available online. She has also supplemented our feature on Sephardim and Mizrahim by showing us some of the treasures to be found via the Web and the

resources that allow us access to them. Zachary Baker has reviewed Stanford University Libraries' exhibition on Yiddish schools. His article describes the rich archive from which material for the exhibition was taken, and the significance of the Yiddish school movement.

I wish to thank Leslie Altnow, AJS's office assistant, for her diligence and enthusiasm in seeking out illustrations for the issue and events to list in our calendar section. Thanks also to Emmanuel Darmon of the Center for Jewish History for his assistance in translating correspondence; to Seth Jerchowder from the Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania; Zippi Rosenne of Beth Hatefutsoth, the Nahum Goldmann Museum of the Jewish Diaspora; Hila Ratzabi of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary; and Randall Belinfante and Esmé Berg of the American Sephardi Federation for their generous assistance in finding and providing illustrations. If you are as impressed as I am by all the sources used to find interesting visual images for *Perspectives*, then we owe thanks to Karin Kugel, whose imagination and high standards as the newsletter's managing editor make it a far better publication.

Your comments and ideas are always appreciated. Please continue to let us know what is of interest to you. You can reach me at prell001@umn.edu.

Riv-Ellen Prell  
*University of Minnesota*

*The Association for Jewish Studies wishes to thank the Center for Jewish History and its constituent organizations—the American Jewish Historical Society, the American Sephardi Federation, the Leo Baeck Institute, the Yeshiva University Museum, and the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research—for providing the AJS with office space at the Center for Jewish History.*

# FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Colleagues,

Last November I was cited by Samuel G. Freedman in his *New York Times* column “On Education” (Nov. 3, 2004). The topic was “Classes in Jewish Studies: Drawing a Non-Jewish Class.” Freedman was intrigued by the striking trend at City College of New York and in Jewish studies programs nationwide of a growing number of non-Jewish students not only attending Jewish studies courses but also majoring and minoring in Jewish studies. He quoted Dr. Roy Mittelman, director of the CCNY program, to the effect that, of the 250 students enrolled in Jewish studies classes at that institution, 26 of whom are majoring and 160 minoring in Jewish studies, some 95 percent are not Jewish. When Freedman spoke with me, I noted that here, too, at the University of Oregon more than half of our students come from non-Jewish backgrounds. Two of our three graduating majors in Judaic studies last June were outstanding students who aspire to academic careers. Each had been accepted into excellent graduate programs; neither is Jewish. While this phenomenon is obviously affected by the demographics and location of each particular institution (neither CCNY nor the University of Oregon have large Jewish student populations), it is a noteworthy sea change in an academic field that was in its earlier days very much, as Freedman puts it, “by Jews, about Jews, and for Jews.” As endowed programs and positions in Jewish studies continue to be established in institutions without traditionally sizable Jewish student bodies, and as we shape our courses to fulfill general

education and diversity requirements in hopes of attracting larger numbers of students, we will increasingly be teaching very diverse student populations. And some of these non-Jewish students will be intrigued enough by what they are learning to major or minor in the field.

The full integration of Jewish studies into the academic landscape and the appeal of the discipline to interested students regardless of their ethnic or religious backgrounds is a positive and welcome trend. Certainly this reality raises interesting questions about our pedagogic approaches and assumptions; for one thing, some of us may need to reevaluate teaching approaches and materials that were produced with primarily Jewish audiences in mind. I think these issues constitute suitable material for pedagogy panels at future AJS meetings, and I encourage you to think about being part of them.

The topic I would like to address in the remainder of this column, however, focuses on another aspect of the “mainstreaming” of Jewish studies. The Association for Jewish Studies welcomes all graduate students, faculty members, and independent scholars who participate in the academic exploration of the Jewish experience. Increasingly graduate students and faculty members in Jewish studies reflect the diversity that characterizes both Jewish life itself and our multicultural society. As academics, we come together out of scholarly interest to share our own research contributions and to learn from the work of others. It should certainly go without saying that it is neither relevant nor appropriate for any member of our organization to make assumptions or inquiries about the marital status, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, religious affiliation, or level of religious practice of any other member. This is especially the case during job interviews held at our annual conference under the auspices of the AJS.

Unfortunately, however, we do hear from year to year of interviews in which questions are broached to job candidates that are not only inappropriate but that contradict the tenets of equal opportunity employers. As a constituent member of the American Council of Learned Societies, AJS endeavors to conform to the general practices of other professional organizations in establishing protocols for interviewing for academic positions. We urge all interviewing institutions to rent space from us for a nominal fee so that candidates can meet with interview teams in neutral spaces that are as free of awkwardness as possible. It is inappropriate to interview candidates in hotel sleeping rooms or busy public spaces, and it is similarly wrong to ask any questions about a candidate’s personal status that are irrelevant to the position at hand. While we agree with the American Academy of Religion that seminaries or institutions of higher learning linked to specific religious denominations may have a legitimate interest in a candidate’s religious affiliation, we also agree that such special requirements must be stated in job advertisements and that the specific qualifications of candidates for those positions should be confirmed prior to issuing interview invitations. I hope that all of our members will remember that the job interview is an inherently unequal interaction in which a disproportionate amount of power resides with the interviewers. Just as AJS expects that all institutional representatives who conduct interviews at our annual meeting will be respectful of the dignity and personal privacy of both female and male candidates, we also assume that interviewers will know better than to ask job seekers questions about their ethnic origins or religious affiliations and practice. That is not what we are about.

**Judith R. Baskin**  
*University of Oregon*

# FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Colleagues,

Members are often surprised to learn that soon after one AJS annual conference ends, planning for the next meeting begins. In fact, the process of organizing the AJS conference begins more than one year in advance, with the search for host hotels initiated at least two years ahead of the meeting and drafting of the next call for papers begun shortly after we say goodbye to conference attendees in December. Planning the conference is a collective effort involving countless hours, days, and even weeks of time volunteered by the AJS's president, division coordinators, program committee, and, most of all, vice president for program, as well as the full-time attention of the AJS's professional staff.

Of course, the most important feature of the conference is its scholarly content: the breadth and depth of scholarship presented, the opportunity for networking through formal and informal discussions, and the chance to explore critical methodological and pedagogical questions in the field. But determining where we engage in this process, namely in which city and in which hotel, also informs the success of a meeting. Indeed, it is a topic on which I receive significant feedback and questions. I would thus like to devote this newsletter column to the process of site selection so that members have insight into the myriad factors that affect where and when the AJS holds its annual meeting.

The first step in planning a given year's conference is determining the host city. The vice president for program and executive director draw suggestions

from the AJS board of directors, division coordinators, program committee, and general membership. Ever since the AJS began rotating its meeting locations, it has sought out host cities that reflect its membership's geographic diversity. It has also attempted to hold meetings in regions with a concentration of Jewish studies programs, both to highlight Jewish studies opportunities around the country and to encourage new participation among scholars who, because of distance, might not otherwise be able to attend.

A critical factor in choosing a location is the availability of kosher hotel facilities. A city generally needs to have at least two hotels that are able to provide kosher catering in order for the AJS to consider it a possibility. Several cities may have only one hotel that offers this service, and that hotel may not have the space, dates, or price range suitable for the AJS's needs.

Once a city has been selected, the vice president for program and executive director work with the AJS's conference planning company to develop a list of suitable facilities. The vice president for program and executive director visit four to six hotels in a given city in order to narrow the list down further to one or two top choices. At this stage, a decisive criterion in choosing a hotel is its space and layout. This is an increasingly challenging factor, as the AJS grows in size but seeks to maintain an intimate feel to its meeting. The AJS aspires for presenters to give papers in rooms that do not crowd or dwarf the audience; for scholars to cross paths naturally between sessions; for registrants to wander easily into the exhibit hall; and, quite simply, for members not to get lost from one session to the next. However, with up to fifteen concurrent panels and numerous other meetings and events, the AJS is no longer able to fit in modest-sized facilities most conducive to such intimate conditions and must increasingly rely on conference hotels. Still, organizers make every effort to consolidate space

and reduce the number of footsteps, elevators, and escalators needed to get from one place to the next.

Another critical factor in making the final hotel selection is the guestroom rate. The AJS has a long tradition of securing very modest room rates at high-quality venues. These modest rates result from the AJS's negotiating efforts, the location of the facility, and the conference's December timing (a traditionally slow period for hotels, especially in colder climates). With the recent upturn in several conference cities' economies and the AJS's exploration of warmer-weather destinations, the effort to keep rates as low as they have been in the past will be a challenge. Moderate room rates are still a very high priority for the organization, but must be weighed against other considerations.

An array of other factors figure into hotel selection, including: meal prices, concessions on audio-visual equipment, proximity to public transportation and restaurants, and overall condition of the facility. Once the AJS has made its top choice, we then negotiate with the hotel to ensure the best possible experience, value, and quality for AJS members. Thus concludes a very slow, careful, and detailed process, the outcome of which, we hope, satisfies all in attendance.

As the AJS office is now in the midst of planning the 2005, 2006, and 2007 meetings, I welcome your suggestions as to what could improve your experience. We aim to make each conference even better than the last and to learn that members wish to return to the city and hotel which they just left. With that in mind, I look forward to welcoming you to the Thirty-seventh Annual Conference in Washington, D.C., December 18–20, 2005. The conference will be held at the Washington Hilton and Towers, where so many of us enjoyed a successful meeting in 2000.

**Rona Sheramy**  
*Association for Jewish Studies*

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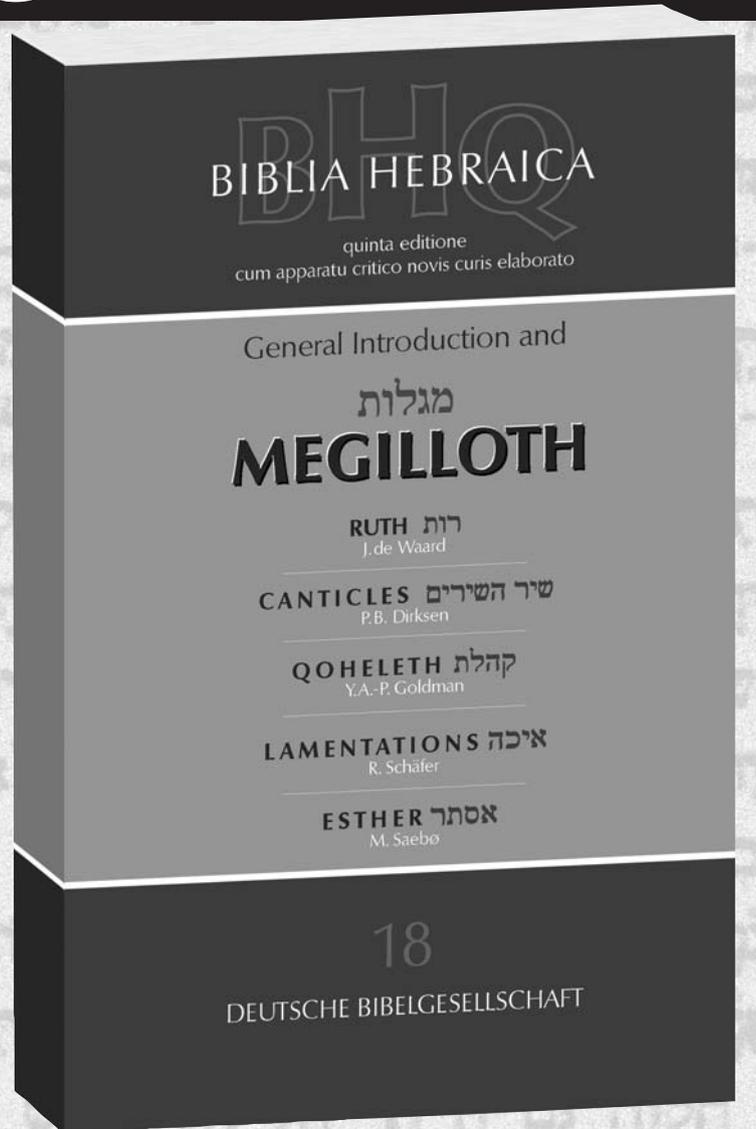
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# MIDDLE EASTERN AND SEPHARDIC STUDIES

*Jonathan Decter*

Like Jewish studies, the field of Sephardic and Middle Eastern Jewry cannot be neatly defined. Its specialists in history, literature, thought, anthropology, and religion focus on diverse Jewish communities that span more than fourteen centuries. The two prongs of the field hang together, in part, due to a misperception on the part of non-specialists that equates the terms “Sephardi” and “Middle Eastern Jew.” Technically, Sephardic Jews include the Jews of Iberia until the Expulsion and their descendents who resided in places as diverse as North Africa, the Ottoman Empire, the Netherlands, the Americas, and even Poland. Middle Eastern Jews are simply Jews of Middle Eastern countries who do not necessarily claim descent from Iberian Jewry. Iraqi, Yemeni, and Persian Jewry formed distinct communities during the Middle Ages and in modernity. In North Africa and elsewhere, Sephardi and indigenous populations intermingled. Although some general halakic distinctions can be made between Ashkenazi and non-Ashkenazi Jews, the binary division of the Jewish world into Ashkenazic and Sephardic blocs is increasingly recognized as an oversimplification.

This issue of *Perspectives* preserves the alliance among various parts of the field in order to highlight important developments and, hopefully, to affect the way in which Jewish studies is conceptualized and

taught. Most survey courses in Jewish studies include some treatment of Iberian Jewry during the medieval period, romantically recalled as the “Golden Age,” but, with few exceptions (Shabbetai Zvi, Spinoza, etc.), fail to trace the evolution of Sephardic Jewry. Middle Eastern Jewry has received even less attention; survey courses often treat only the influx of Middle Eastern migrants and refugees to the State of Israel and the West.

The following series of articles does not purport to represent the full range of the growing field of Middle Eastern and Sephardic studies. Medieval Iberia and the Arabic speaking communities of the medieval Mediterranean basin are not addressed at all. Rather, as is commonly done in *Perspectives*, we offer a suite of three essays covering the state of the field, useful tips on pedagogy, and a sample of research in progress. Harvey Goldberg’s essay discusses the growth of the field beyond its uneasy beginnings and highlights the ways in which it has been shaped by the study of history, halakah, literature, and anthropology. The essay treats the impact of Western colonialism on Eastern Jewry, self-initiated encounters with ideas of the *Haskalah*, and patterns of modernization and identity. Matt Goldish’s contribution on pedagogy provides pragmatic ideas for supplementing surveys of Jewish history with primary and secondary

materials pertaining to Sephardic and Middle Eastern Jewry, primarily during the early modern period. The third piece by anthropologist Oren Kosansky exemplifies the benefits of approaching a recognized topic within Jewish studies from the perspective of an ancillary discipline. Kosansky treats saint veneration among Moroccan Jews—a practice that has often been exoticized in modern scholarship—within the indigenous categories of those who follow the rite and situates scholarship hailing the practice as a model of Muslim-Jewish “syncretism” within French colonial and Moroccan nationalist discourses.

Like all areas of Jewish studies, the field of Sephardic and Middle Eastern Jewry has become increasingly specialized. It is not on the verge of breaking apart, however, as scholars in related sub-fields continue to meet, collaborate, and share ideas. For the first time, the widely used textbook, *The Jew in the Modern World*, by Paul Mendes-Flohr and Yehuda Reinharz, will devote a full section to the field in its forthcoming new edition—a sure sign that Sephardic and Middle Eastern studies has come of age.

*Jonathan Decter is Assistant Professor on the Edmond J. Safra Chair in Sephardic Studies at Brandeis University.*

# RECENT SCHOLARSHIP ON EASTERN JEWRIES

Harvey Goldberg

In the spring of 1976 a symposium sponsored by the Education and Culture Committee of the Knesset discussed introducing the topic of the heritage of Eastern Jewry into Israel's educational system. The occasion showed growing awareness that the histories and cultures of Middle Eastern Jewries had been ignored in the curricula of Israeli schools. This awareness, in turn, reflected the increased electoral strength of the voters from non-Ashknazi backgrounds, expressed dramatically a year later when the Mapai party was voted out of power for the first time in Israel's history.

Despite widespread feeling within and outside academe that it was now time to encourage exploration of Yehudei Ha-Mizrah (Jews of the East), the historian Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson delivered an address at the symposium challenging the new efforts. Ben-Sasson made several points. The heritage of the Jewish people consisted of a plurality of traditions, he argued, and should not be divided simply into "eastern" and "western" sections. Moreover, not all Middle Eastern Jews shared a monolithic Sephardi heritage; Middle Eastern Jews, in fact, were at times in tension with one another. In addition, colonialism was experienced differently, for example, by North African Jews

under French control and by Iraqi Jews under British imperialism. The issue of comparability and comparison was further complicated by communities such as the Jews of Yemen

who were relatively isolated from Western influences and thus might be more accurately compared with traditional communities in eastern Europe than with other Eastern Jewries.

Ben-Sasson pointed out another pitfall that might well beset an



The first Jewish National Fund Committee, Tripoli 1915. © Beth Hatefitsoth, Photo Archive, courtesy of The Cultural Center of Libyan Jews, Tel Aviv.

attempt to identify a Jewry of the East for educational curriculum: the possibility to reduce the cultures of those communities to "museum artifacts," "folklore," and the popular veneration of sainted rabbis. To this end, he advocated studying their literate traditions, a bold suggestion, considering that it was not yet clear what sources would become available for this work.

The eminent historian did not win over his audience that day; later that year the Ministry of Education and Culture established a unit to promote the study of Eastern

Jewries, from grade school to university settings. Ben-Sasson's cautions, however, provide a background to describe some of the important advances in the scholarship of Jews in Middle Eastern countries in modern times. His insights on colonialism provide a good starting point for a brief review of this recent scholarship. The colonial contexts are central for two related reasons. First, the economic penetration and political control by European states of Middle Eastern lands resulted in economic changes, demographic shifts, and new formal statuses for the Jews living there.

Colonialism carried a second meaning for Eastern Jewries in relationship to European Jews. The latter claimed that the former required "regeneration" in order to follow the road to emancipation in ways that paralleled Western Jewry. A central player in this paternalistic project was the Paris-based Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU). Aron Rodrigue's *Images of Sephardi and Eastern Jewries in Transition*

(1993) explores how teachers in AIU schools perceived communities in the Balkans and the Middle East, while Daniel Schroeter's *The Sultan's Jew* (2002) traces the process whereby Jews in Europe first came to see themselves as different from and superior to Jews in "the East." Schroeter's analysis is complemented by *Haskala* author Samuel Romanelli's *Travail in an Arab Land*, translated by Yedida and Norman Stillman (1989). Dealing with the period after World War II, Yaron Tsur's *A Torn Community* (Hebrew, 2001) shows the confluence of and tension

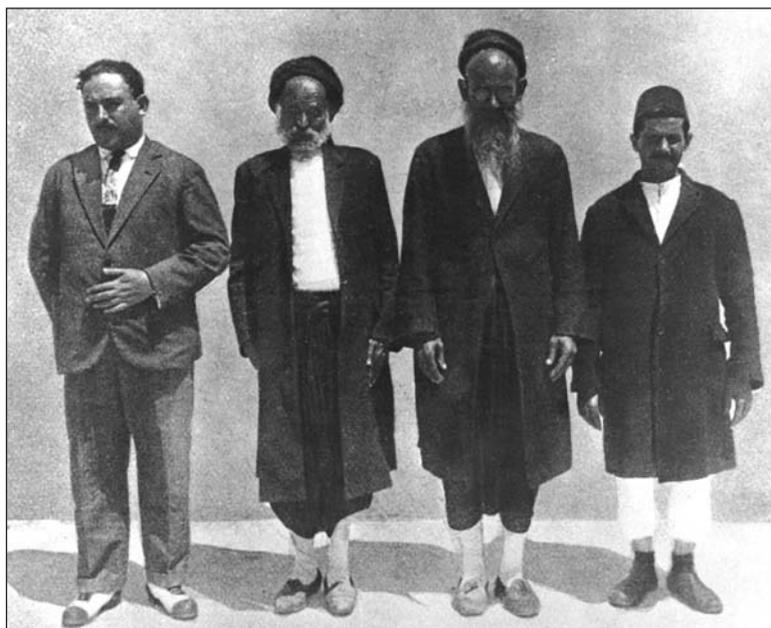
between views of Jews in Morocco as representing a background lagging behind the West and ideologies that envision them as part of a Jewish future. Taken together, this recent scholarship illuminates the complexity of the relationship between Western and Eastern Jewry and the colonial experiences of the latter.

The scholarly agenda of those studying Eastern Jewry has also explored relationships between Jews and the Muslim majority in which older patterns of interaction continued while responses to colonial contexts emerged. Some of this research has effectively combined anthropological and historical perspectives to demonstrate the complications of that relationship. *The Last Arab Jews* (1984), a study of Jerba, Tunisia, by Abraham Udovitch and Lucette Valensi, and Harvey Goldberg's *Jewish Life in Muslim Libya* (1990) are examples. Bat-Zion Eraqui Klorman's *The Jews of Yemen in the Nineteenth Century* (1993) demonstrates how the religious and political cultures of Jews and Muslims were interlaced, and Ammiel Alcalay's *After Jews and Arabs* (1993) points to the pitfalls of sharply dichotomizing "Jew" and "Arab" as bifurcated realms. Yoram Bilu's *Without Bounds: The Life and Death of Rabbi Ya'aqov Wazana* (2000) shows how demonology among sections of Moroccan Jewry involved not only a set of notions and practices remaining from the past but continued to be part and

parcel of twentieth century socio-historical developments. Joelle Bahloul's *The Architecture of Memory* (1996) illustrates the

## THE SCHOLARLY AGENDA...EXPLORED RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN JEWS AND THE MUSLIM MAJORITY IN WHICH OLDER PATTERNS OF INTERACTION CONTINUED WHILE RESPONSES TO COLONIAL CONTEXTS EMERGED.

complex position of Jews in an Algerian town navigating between Muslim and European worlds. This



Members of the Rabbinial court of Benghazi, and the secretary of the community board, 1920(?). From right: Rabbi Rahamim Medar, last chief Rabbi of Benghazi, Rabbi Mordecai Hacohen, author of Higgid Mordecai, Rabbi Hammus Fellah, chief judge of the court.  
© Beth Hatefutsoth, Photo Archive, courtesy of The Cultural Center of Libyan Jews, Tel Aviv.

scholarship has been particularly effective at demonstrating the multiple experiences of Jews in Arab countries, and underlining the important intellectual constructs required for the study of these groups.

While a substantial portion of the scholarship on Middle Eastern Jews is devoted to establishing its historical and cultural frameworks, a further challenge has been to analyze processes internal to Jewish life in these cultures. Shlomo Doshen's *The Mellah Society* (1989) draws on rabbinic literature combined with anthropological

analyses of communal organization and leadership to portray Jewish life in Morocco in the period prior to European influence. Zvi Zohar's

*The Luminous Face of the East* (Hebrew, 2001) documents trends in halakic decision-making among nineteenth- and twentieth-century Sephardic rabbis.

Zohar demonstrates that Sephardic rabbis were more lenient than their Ashkenazi counterparts. He

suggests that the flexibility inherent in traditional Sephardic rabbinic culture resulted from the absence of competing religious ideologies. Matthias Lehmann's *Ladino Rabbinic Literature and Ottoman Sephardic Culture* (2005) examines rabbis writing in the vernacular while reacting to new trends in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century thought. These works utilize sources that illuminate the cultures of Sephardic and Middle Eastern Jewries

and effectively demonstrate that the extant models of European Jewry of a comparable period are not sufficient for understanding Eastern Jewry's experiences.

Significant scholarship has dealt with Eastern Jewry's engagement with political and intellectual movements usually associated with European Jewry only. In addition to histories of the rise of Zionism among Eastern Jews, scholars have also studied the *Haskalah*, which, for example, stimulated local creativity in Hebrew. Harvey Goldberg's publication of Mordecai Ha-Cohen of Tripoli's *The Book of*

*Mordechai* (1980) brought to light the existence of “native” movements outside of Europe that reflected the desire to invigorate Jewish life rather than change it radically. Sarah A. Stein’s *Making Jews Modern* (2004) examines the Ladino and Yiddish presses in order to provide a comparative view of vernacular-reading communities. Taken together, these studies show how Eastern Jews underwent processes of modernization not unlike those of their European counterparts, albeit according to different patterns of engagement.

Transnational analyses have been critical to illuminating the dynamics of Jewish life. Walter Zenner’s *A Global Community* (2000) follows Jews from Aleppo, beginning with their historical origins in Syria, to the Americas and Israel. Another example concerns Egypt, where the origins of the Jewish population were diverse. Different aspects of Jewish experience there are emphasized by Gudrun Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt, 1914–1952* (1989), Michael Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt, 1920–1970* (1992), and Joel Beinin,

*The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry* (1998). The latter work challenges the way nationalist-based narratives, both Israeli and Egyptian, skew the complex past and ongoing diasporic features of these Jews.

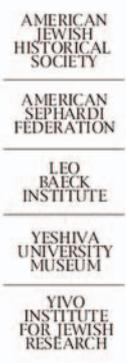
Transnational questions also enter into the realm of narratives, and appear in the complexities of identity embedded within both written and spoken languages. Examples of scholarship on this issue are Nancy Berg’s *Exile from Exile* (1996), which discusses the Arabic writings of Jews from Iraq living in Israel, and Esther Schely-Newman’s *Our Lives Are But Stories* (2002) depicting Tunisian women in an Israeli village who continue to narrate in Judeo-Arabic.

A number of edited collections of the scholarship of Eastern Jewry are now in print, ranging from Norman Stillman’s *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times* (1991), which is also a sourcebook, to the recent *The Jews of the Middle East and North Africa in Modern Times* (2003) by Reeva Simon, Michael Laskier, and Sara Reguer. Others include Deshen and Moshe Shokeid’s *Predicament of*

*Homecoming* (1974), Goldberg’s *Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewries* (1996), and Deshen and Zenner’s *Jews among Muslims* (1996).

Looking back at Ben-Sasson’s address, it appears that despite the somewhat arbitrary and monolithic notion of “Jews of the East,” the scholarship that emerged, both in Israel and elsewhere, has amply documented the diversity of historical trends and cultural creativity among these Jews. Ben-Sasson’s warnings were well placed, but the flourishing of this scholarship suggests that the complexity and diversity of these cultures and histories have not been ignored. Indeed, the combination of both ethnographic and historical sources, the study of peoples at “home” and in the “diaspora,” and the effective use of comparison may well serve as models for the study of Jewish life in other regions.

*Harvey E. Goldberg is Professor of Anthropology in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.*





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# TEACHING UNDERGRADUATES THE HISTORY OF EARLY MODERN SEPHARDIC AND EASTERN JEWS

Matt Goldish

Teaching the history of Sephardic and Eastern Jews from the 1492 Expulsion to the Enlightenment presents both unique problems and unparalleled opportunities. The opportunities are often overlooked by those who specialize in traditional ancient, medieval, or modern topics, and do not put sufficient emphasis on early modern Jews outside Ashkenaz. It is overlooked even more by the authors of Jewish history textbooks whose focus often shifts away from these communities after the Spanish Golden Age and never really returns. Consider what they might miss. Jewish law was forever reshaped by the Spanish exile, R. Joseph Karo. Kabbalah, which was mainly a product of *Reconquista*-era Spain, was developed and spread after 1492 largely by Sephardic Jews. Sephardim, including those who were “court Jews,” were at the center of the burgeoning mercantilist enterprise in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, generations before the concept existed in Ashkenaz. They excelled in trade, mobility, political influence, Torah scholarship, literature, artistic creativity, mysticism, and many other areas. A very high proportion of the major Jewish personalities in the critical early modern centuries came from their ranks.

The problems begin with definitions. If Sepharad is Spain, what does it mean to be a Sephardic Jew after the Expulsion? For how

many generations does a Sephardic identity continue—especially if there is frequent intermarriage between Spanish exiles and local Jews? What of *conversos* who return to Judaism but have no living tradition of practice? What about the Western Sephardim who live in Amsterdam, Hamburg, and other typically Ashkenazi areas? More vexing is the question of Eastern Jewries in Asia and Africa who were not overrun by Sephardic influence. The Sephardim, usually underrepresented in teaching, are positively lavished with attention compared with these little-known Jewries. How many of us were taught about the trials and triumphs of early modern Yemenite, Bukharian, Persian, or Caucasus Jews in contrast to the centrality of Chmielnicki Revolt, Spinoza, or the Council of the Four Lands?

Another challenge in teaching Sephardic and Eastern Jewish history of this period is students’ unfamiliarity with the general background of the regions in question. While the standard courses in Western civilization may give them a context for the lives of European Jews, students often know almost nothing of the Ottoman Empire and its vassal states, Mediterranean trade patterns, or power struggles between Moroccan potentates. This unfamiliarity doubles the challenge of teaching about the Jews in those lands; but it also doubles the satisfaction when it is done well.

Finally, there is sometimes a challenge in finding appropriate readings for courses. While one or two

American institutions may have a class devoted to post-Expulsion Sephardic and Eastern Jewries, the more common situations are surveys of Jewish history, and, more rarely, the early modern Jewish history course. Fortunately, there has never been more material available in English for these purposes; so, despite the short supply of well-integrated textbooks, there is a lot that can be done with both types of teaching.

When using secondary works, I usually find that students are more engaged by biographies or monographs than by essay collections. Most available books deal with Sephardim and not with other Eastern Jewish communities. I teach at a state university, where the price of books matters a great deal to students, so I am sensitive to that factor as well. Despite the \$40 hardcover cost, however, I especially liked *A Man of Three Worlds* by Mercedes García-Arenal and Gerard Wiegers (2003), dealing with the wild life of the Moroccan diplomat and pirate, Samuel Pallache. This book shows the complex fluidity of religious, professional, and geographical identities to be found among early modern Sephardim.

That fluidity is even more pronounced in the experience of the *conversos*. The journalist Andrée Aelion Brooks presents a highly readable portrait of the sixteenth-century *conversa* Doña Gracia Nasi and her family in *The Woman Who Defied Kings* (2002), though historians may have qualms about some aspects of her presentation. I am still fond of the dated but enjoyable Cecil Roth volumes, *The House of Nasi* (1947). David Graizbord’s *Souls in Dispute* (2004) follows the movement of *conversos*

who had escaped Iberia and returned to Judaism, but ultimately chose to go back to Spain and Catholicism in the seventeenth century. Miriam

Bodian's *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation* (1997)

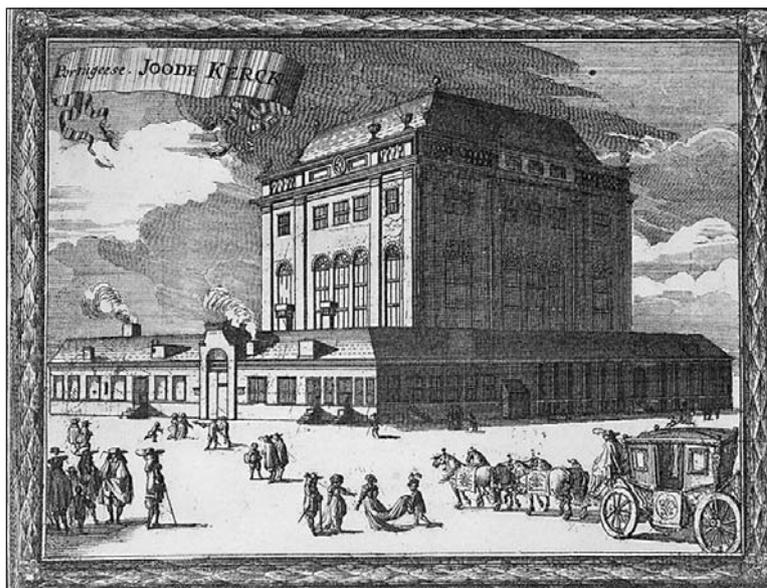
offers a useful and well-written introduction to the complex identities of the Western Sephardim. Another fine work on this community, Daniel Swetschinski's *Reluctant Cosmopolitans* (2000), has just appeared in paperback as well. Several literary works of historical importance by post-Expulsion converso authors are available in English. These include Timothy Oelman's *Marrano Poets of the Seventeenth Century* (1982), and David Slavitt's edition of Pinto Delgado's *Poem of Queen Esther* (1999).

Secondary works and lectures are effectively supplemented with documents. I especially like the recent trend to create primary source readers that incorporate extensive background. Norman Stillman's excellent *Jews of Arab Lands* (1979) is certainly the best such work for this field, though it is more than some undergraduates can handle. Lawrence Fine's *Judaism in Practice* (2001) and Marc Saperstein's *Jewish Preaching* (1989) belong to this hybrid type as well. Though neither focuses exclusively on early modern Sephardim, both contain much excellent Sephardic material. Jewish travel literature is one of the few places to find primary sources on many Eastern Jewish communities. The old standard, Elkan Nathan Adler's *Jewish Travellers in the Middle Ages* (1987), remains a

useful and very reasonably priced collection. Adler includes an excerpt from the journal of Rabbi Hayyim Yosef David Azulai (Hid"á), a late-

## THERE IS CERTAINLY MORE MATERIAL AVAILABLE ON SEPHARDIC AND EASTERN JEWRIES NOW THAN EVER BEFORE.

eighteenth-century traveler, but a full (if quirky) translation is now available in Benjamin Cymerman's *Diaries of Rabbi Ha'im Yosef David Azulai* (1997). On the Persian community, Vera Basch Moreen's *Iranian Jewry's Hour of Peril and*



Anonymous etching of Portuguese Synagogue, Amsterdam, 1675.  
Courtesy of The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary.

*Heroism* (1987) contains useful texts.

It is worth noting that appropriate documents on Sephardic Jewry are widely available. For instance, Jacob R. Marcus's *Jew in the Medieval World* (1975) provides sources on the Golden Age of Spanish Jewry, but also such treasures as a letter on the Cairo Purim of 1524 (celebrating salvation from a dangerous Sultan); reports on Turkish Jewry in the 1550s from the German factor Hans Dernschwam, featuring an eyewitness account of Doña Gracia Nasi; and excerpts from the *Shulhan*

*Arukh*, among others. *Memoirs of My People* by Leo Schwarz (1943) provides material on David ha-Reubeni and Solomon Molkho, and a great piece from the Hid"á. Franz Kobler's *Letters of Jews Through the Ages* (1978) yields

“An Invitation from Turkey to Provence” and various documents on Shabbatai Zvi, as well as some on the Western Sephardim. Even heavily Ashkenaz-centered collections, like Nahum Glatzer's *Judaic Tradition; Texts* (1982) and

Paul Mendes-Flohr and Yehuda Reinharz's *The Jew in the Modern World* (1995) contain a few items of Sephardic interest. (A third edition of *The Jew in the Modern World* with an added section on Sephardic issues is in the works.)

While we wait for the appearance of a perfect textbook that abandons the easy Eurocentric story and incorporates the

whole Jewish experience, the judicious use of documents and accessible biographies or monographs can fill many of the gaps and help to create a striking and memorable counterbalance to the Ashkenazi-centered narrative. There is certainly more material available on Sephardic and Eastern Jewries now than ever before.

*Matt Goldish is the Samuel M. and Esther Melton Associate Professor of History at the Ohio State University.*

# BEYOND EXOTICISM AND SYNCRETISM: SITUATING MOROCCAN JEWISH PILGRIMAGE IN JEWISH STUDIES

Oren Kosansky

Aside from demonstrating the diversity of Jewish experience in its broad historical and geographic scope, what can research on North African cases add to Jewish studies? And, as a step towards answering this question, where have such cases been situated in the field? These have been the questions and concerns that have occupied me as I bring my anthropological research on Moroccan Jewish saints and pilgrimage into dialogue with Jewish studies.

Morocco, of course, does not represent the North African Jewish world in its entirety, nor is saint pilgrimage the only regional phenomenon that has attracted scholarly attention. Yet, Moroccan hagiographic practices and beliefs are of particular interest here because they are often taken, in popular and academic discourses alike, as exemplars of North African Jewish specificity. Over the past century, Moroccan Jewish saint veneration has often been made to appear interesting through two major tropes. One, which might be called exoticism, emphasizes the apparent otherness of Moroccan saint traditions with respect to a modern Ashkenazi center, which in its bluntest formulation has been cast as

authentic Judaism itself. The other, which we can call syncretism, highlights the cultural commonalities and social interactions which link Moroccan Jewish traditions with similar Muslim ones. The two tropes,



Shrine of Rabbi David Ben Barukh, region of Taroudant, Morocco.  
Courtesy of Oren Kosansky.

moreover, are related. It is largely by virtue of the putative Islamic influences on popular Judaic practice in Morocco that saint pilgrimage has often been cast beyond the pale of normative Judaism.

Admittedly, my own ethnographic and historical research in some ways reinforces the notion that Morocco is interesting for Jewish studies primarily via the case of pilgrimage. My aim, however, has been to take a critical approach to these tropes, partly by suggesting alternatives to exoticism and partly by tracing the genealogical

development of syncretism with respect to saint pilgrimage in Morocco. In its ethnographic mode, my research focuses on the ways in which Jews in contemporary Morocco experience, perform, and conceptualize their relationships with saints. Beginning with the perspectives of social actors themselves, I have been developing a series of ethnographically grounded arguments that situate pilgrimage squarely in the domain of what I call *Torah practice*. This domain includes liturgical, textual, pedagogical, and exegetical activities through which Moroccan Jews, men in particular, engage Torah as the central medium of Jewish experience. At the center of this domain is pilgrimage itself, which is neither a substitute for nor an artificial

adjunct to Torah practice, but rather an integral expression of it. On the one hand, shrine spaces are made sacred through Torah-centered elements such as synagogues, *genizot*, and the graves of saint-sages, each of which are the objects of attendant halakic activities during the course of pilgrimages. Pilgrimages provide one of the most intense contexts in which such things as Sabbath prayer, Torah sermons, ritual slaughter, respect for Torah, honoring sages, charity, and so forth are

enacted. Pilgrimage, in sum, does not exist aside from halakic practice, nor are shrines alternative to synagogues. Rather, all of these ritual arenas are deeply imbricated and mutually constituted in the lives of Moroccan Jews who put their faith in the enduring power of sainted rabbis.

On the other hand, the rituals that are distinctive to pilgrimage events (*hillulot*) assume forms that are both models of and models for Torah practice in other contexts. This process is most clearly evident in representations and rituals in which:

1) the entombed bodies of deceased saints are treated as Torah scrolls;  
 2) the saints' shrines assume the form of the Torah ark; and  
 3) core pilgrimage rituals mirror the liturgical Torah service. Shrines and pilgrimages,

moreover, are not the only contexts in which Moroccan Jews encounter their sainted rabbis. Hagiographic stories are written and published in textual forms that adhere to the conventions of rabbinic literary genres. Such texts, along with hagiographic poems composed as *piyyutim*, are

treated, read, and learned as Torah during pilgrimages, in study groups (*hevrot*), and in synagogues. Pictorial icons manifest the sacred, concrete form of saints just as scrolls in synagogues manifest the words of Torah in their most sensual and ritually charged form. Hagiographic icons are themselves often framed in velvet-embroidered matting, crafted in the same style as the mantles that encase Torah scrolls. Such icons, to follow further this metaphorical linkage between saints and Torah scrolls, are addressed with ritual gestures that are also enacted in the choreography of the Torah service.

Given these patterns, it should not be surprising that Moroccan Jewish men who invest themselves in the worlds of saints and pilgrimage do not generally conceive of their commitments in anything other than familiar, Judaic, and more specifically Torah-centered, terms. This does not necessarily represent ignorance of neighboring Muslim rituals that take on similar forms and that rely on similar ideologies of saintly power and intercession. Rather, Moroccan Jews

have at their disposal an elaborate and sufficient set of Judaic ideas and practices through which to constitute and understand their interactions with saints as Torah scholars, miracle workers, and divine mediators. Rather



Praying by the grave of a tzaddik.  
 Courtesy of Oren Kosansky.

than beginning with the similarities between Jewish and Muslim hagiographic traditions in Morocco, I begin, as do many Moroccan devotees themselves, with the similarities between Jewish hagiographic traditions and the other domains of Judaic life upon which they draw and to which they contribute.

What, then, of syncretism and the relationship between Jewish and Muslim saint traditions in Morocco? There is little doubt that the particular forms and ideological underpinnings of Jewish saint traditions in Morocco developed through interaction with Muslim parallels. At a sociological level, much has been made of the veneration of common Muslim and Jewish saints by members of both communities, a pattern which harkens to both Sufi and kabbalistic attentiveness to the prolific distribution of holiness in the world. The sociology of mutual saint veneration in the present (and I would venture to say in the past as well) is

more complicated than suggested by certain romanticized glosses, but there nevertheless continues to be a certain amount of cross- veneration and common pilgrimage. There is nothing categorically incorrect about such observations, but what interests me most are the specific historical conditions under which Judeo-Muslim syncretism comes to be taken as the most significant feature of Jewish pilgrimage in Morocco.

Two examples drawn from different moments in the recent history of Morocco and tied to different political projects can illuminate what I have in mind. In 1948, a French colonial



Reading Psalms by the grave of Rabbi Amram Ben Divan.  
 Courtesy of Oren Kosansky.

ethnographer by the name of Louis Voinot published a volume entitled *Judeo-Muslim Pilgrimages of Morocco* in which the phenomenon at hand was taken as nothing less than a perfect example of Moroccan culture in its most authentic form. As the book's title suggests, that form is fundamentally syncretic. One implication of this characterization, as developed in this text and others, is that whatever unity Morocco may appear to have (e.g., Muslim and Arab) is in fact disrupted by myriad historical forces and heterogeneous elements (e.g., Jewish) that constitute Moroccan culture and society. In this vein, the imputed syncretism of Judeo-Muslim pilgrimage contributed to more general colonial discourses, which attributed to Morocco enough unity

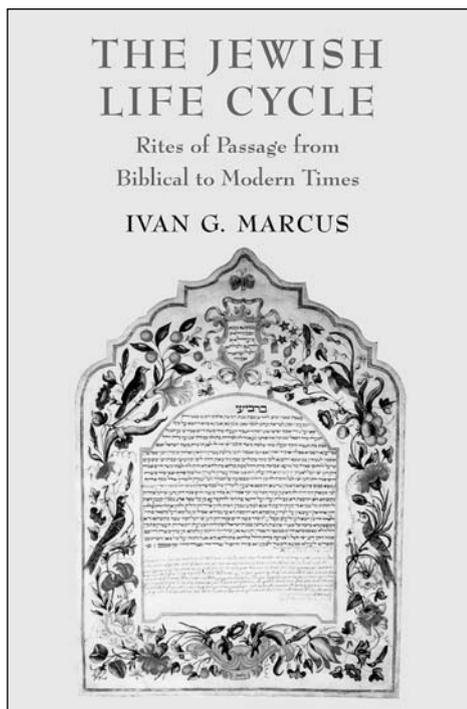
and distinctiveness to be construed as an authentic nation, yet not so much unity to provide the foundation for common interests and possible resistance to imperial rule. Syncretism, that is, was a useful notion in the politics of French colonial knowledge.

Despite the radically changed political circumstances of the late twentieth century, pilgrimage remains an emblem of Moroccan national society, and syncretism remains one key motif in public representations of *hillulot*. At one level, the persistence of Jewish pilgrimage traditions in postcolonial Morocco provides an opportunity for the Moroccan state to project, on an increasingly global stage, its tolerance of religious minorities. At yet another level, saint pilgrimage is officially portrayed as a longstanding and distinctive national tradition that transcends Muslim and Jewish difference. The hyphenated label *Judeo-Muslim* is carried over from colonial discourse, but now it is used to very different effect as an emblem of

the tolerance, pluralism, and transcendence that characterizes Morocco as a liberal nation-state. These are only some of the valences that have contributed to the resilience of syncretism as a dominant sign of Moroccan Jewish pilgrimage over the past century. My point is that we need to take a critical look at the reflex to import Moroccan Jewish pilgrimage into the general discourse of Jewish studies as an example of interactions between Jewish society and its exotic, non-Jewish contexts. We must ask not only what insights this reflex provides but also what insights it excludes. It may be true that we can learn much from cases like Moroccan saint pilgrimage about the relationships between Jewish cultural life and the broader environment in which it is found. But why privilege these kinds of relationships over others when dealing with the North African context, and popular practices in particular? I have suggested two alternative approaches, one which attends to saint pilgrimage as experienced in the context of local

Judaic life and the other which investigates the historical situations in which Judeo-Muslim interaction has dominated discourses about pilgrimage. There is, by way of conclusion, a third approach. What of the relationships, similarities, and historical linkages between Judeo-Moroccan saint traditions and eastern European ones? There is suggestive evidence—in the content of hagiographic narratives, in the forms of hagiographic literature, in the style of hagiographic iconography, and in the well-established Mediterranean networks of rabbinic contact—that Hassidism, as much as Moroccan Sufism, was a significant factor in the development of modern saint traditions in Morocco. And if this is the case then we must reconsider entirely the nature of the otherness and syncretism that Moroccan saint traditions represent.

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We anticipate that projects will deal with questions such as the following:

- Under Islamic rule, which factors unified and distinguished political majorities and minorities (e.g., language, residential and occupational patterns, economic life, social and religious customs)?
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# PERSPECTIVES ON TECHNOLOGY

## TREASURE HUNTING FOR NEW JUDAIC RESOURCES ON THE WORLD WIDE WEB

Heidi G. Lerner

The World Wide Web (WWW) has opened up new sources of free information to individuals as well as professionals working at universities and colleges, museums, and smaller institutions. These repositories of digital knowledge, popularly known as digital libraries, have created exciting possibilities for enhanced scholarly communication. E-books and documents, sound recordings, visual images, three-dimensional objects, and previously hidden archival treasures are now regularly appearing online. Significantly, many of these resources are not indexed or described in a way that allows them to be easily found on the Web. The ongoing challenge is to find ways to make it easier for researchers to learn about, locate, and use these resources.

### Digital Resources on Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews

Sephardic and Mizrahi studies, to take one example, have benefited from this trend. Among the newly digitalized primary resources is University of California, Davis's "Folk Literature of the Sephardic Jews" ([www.sephardifolklit.org/flsj](http://www.sephardifolklit.org/flsj)), a multimedia online archive of ballads and oral literature in Judeo-Spanish. Site visitors can view transcriptions of the texts or listen to entire recordings from an online audio archive of ballads. The site is searchable by key words and phrases.

At the University of Pennsylvania, The Schoenberg Center for Electronic Text and Image (SCETI, [sceti.library.upenn.edu/morais](http://sceti.library.upenn.edu/morais)) recently has made available on the Web two important Judaic archival collections. The Morais Ledger is a digital publication of a scrapbook that belonged to Sabato Morais (1823–1897), a Sephardic Jewish leader and the principal founder of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City. The Morais Ledger can be searched by key word or via a hypertext index linked to each item. SCETI also has mounted a searchable Web site of *genizah* fragments from the University of Pennsylvania and Cambridge University. The Penn-Cambridge Genizah pilot project provides high-resolution color scans and detailed descriptive cataloging of each fragment, as well as easy navigation and innovative display features.

The Seminar für Sprachen und Kulturen des Vorderen Orients Semitistik at Universität Heidelberg has created the Semitisches Tonarchiv (SemArch, [www.semarch.uni-hd.de](http://www.semarch.uni-hd.de)). This project provides a Web-based archive of sound recordings of Semitic languages and their dialects.

The Sephardic Folk Literature Archive, Genizah Fragment Project, Morais Ledger database, and the SemArch are four of a small but growing number of digital collections that can be used by Jewish studies scholars teaching and researching Sephardic and Mizrahi studies.

### Federated Searching

Yet, how can one actually find these archives? Jewish studies, because of its interdisciplinary nature, has its scholarly and bibliographic resources scattered among a variety of subject- and thematic-specific research tools. A researcher may not even know how or what to choose from among the broad range of electronic databases and search tools that their library subscribes to or makes available to them. As a response to the growing need to help scholars locate the wide variety of primary and secondary sources that may exist in a library's or institution's Web environment, federated searching (also known as meta-searching or cross-database searching) technology is being developed that allows searchers to look for information across many resources with a single search. For example, a patron can simultaneously search across all of a library's catalogs, full-text and bibliographic databases, and Internet search engines through a single easy-to-use Web interface. Assuming that the search engine is well-designed, researchers will no longer need to perform multiple searches of a variety of disconnected resources, each with their own search and query language and display formats.

### Subject Portals

Individuals and institutions maintain a number of directories of Jewish studies resources that are sometimes erroneously referred to as "portals." To date, these for the most part are not much more than listings or static collections of links to other Web sites, and do not offer the ability to search by keyword or content. Two such services that have recently offered search options are the Academic Guide to Jewish History ([link.library.utoronto.ca/jewishhistory](http://link.library.utoronto.ca/jewishhistory)) and the Jewish History Resource Center ([www.dinur.org/resources](http://www.dinur.org/resources)).

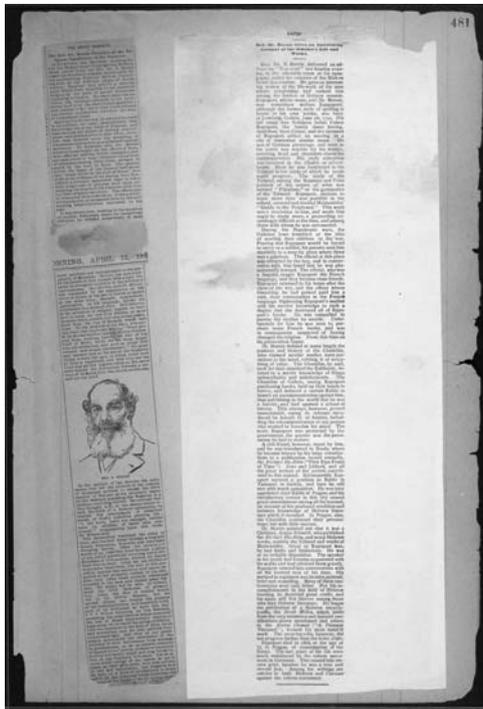
Subject portals or gateways are search services that bring together information and resources from a variety of sources specific to a subject area and work very much in the same way as library catalogs. They organize and consolidate the data into an easily navigable format. They direct their researchers towards content that is freely available although difficult to find using a non-specific search engine. Many of these services offer reliability through standardized policies and procedures.

The Humbul Humanities Hub ([www.humbul.ac.uk](http://www.humbul.ac.uk)), a project of the Research Discovery Network (RDN) and the Humanities Computing Unit at Oxford University, provides a “portal” or “gateway” to a growing number of evaluated resources in the arts and humanities. Sites are selected on the basis of criteria developed in partnership with the research libraries and universities that contribute to this service; individuals with expertise in the relevant subject disciplines and following consistent standards and practices catalog these sites. Links are automatically checked on a daily basis and entries are updated regularly. More than two hundred resources relevant to Jewish studies can be easily located via this catalog. Researchers can refine their search query by type of resource, language, subject, or period and can also recommend new items for inclusion.

### Open Archives Initiative (OAI)

Another type of search service is based on the Open Archives Initiative (OAI, [www.openarchives.org](http://www.openarchives.org)). This project emerged to help researchers locate electronic resources that were not visible to traditional search engines. Known as the “invisible Web,” these resources exist in databases and catalogs that search engines have no direct access to. The OAI approach to this problem is to define standards for “metadata

harvesting.” A repository or database publishes information about the resources it contains, known as “metadata” (data about



Page from the Morais Ledger, as viewed online at [sceti.library.upenn.edu/morais](http://sceti.library.upenn.edu/morais).

Courtesy of The Schoenberg Center for Electronic Text and Image at the University of Pennsylvania.

data). Search service providers “harvest” this metadata and thus index the resources in the repository. The metadata provides descriptive information about the type of a particular resource and its content.

Initially, OAI provided access to pre-prints and other e-prints. Since then it has expanded to help researchers locate all types of digital objects including dissertations and other types of texts, images, and video and audio files. Historically, archives and other repositories have followed a variety of different methods to describe their holdings. OAI was developed to provide standardization and sharing of information about collections. Freely accessible services such as the University of Michigan’s OAIster project ([www.oaister.org](http://www.oaister.org)), use OAI technologies to locate digital resources that would otherwise be “hidden” from the user. Not only

does OAIster provide searchers with information (metadata) about a particular resource, but they also can link up to the digital object or text itself. So far, OAIster has indexed more than four and a half million scholarly documents and images from 396 institutions or repositories (as of January 6, 2005). A search on “Jewish and dissertation” returned thirty-three records “harvested” from nineteen repositories or institutions; the keyword “Jewish” and resource type “video” retrieved records for seven video files available from three repositories (Library of Congress American History Project, OpenVideo Project, T-Space University of Toronto’s Institutional Repository; searched Jan. 17, 2005).

### Conclusion

The Jewish studies community is starting to take advantage of Web-based technologies to provide open and free access to its cultural and intellectual resources. A small number of projects are in various stages of development, but these often lack the funding and/or technical know-how to fully bring them to completion. Significantly, many Jewish materials and resources can be found on the Web that have been brought online by various interdisciplinary and non-Jewish specific projects and initiatives. It is imperative that our community of scholars and institutions work together and create formal and informal partnerships to develop new, or take advantage of, existing standards, to create high-quality digital resources and provide more uniform and easier access.

*Heidi Lerner is the Hebraica/Judaica Cataloger at Stanford University.*

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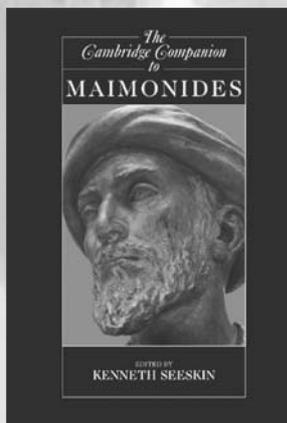
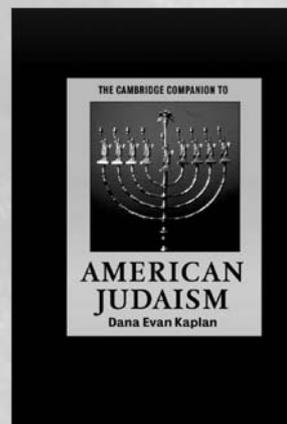
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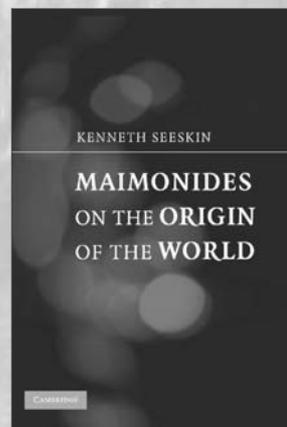
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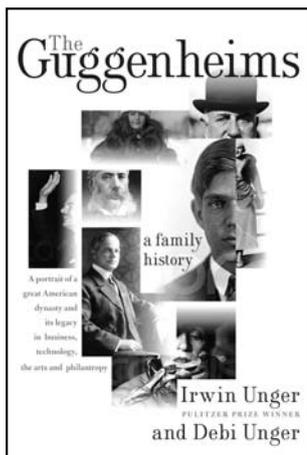
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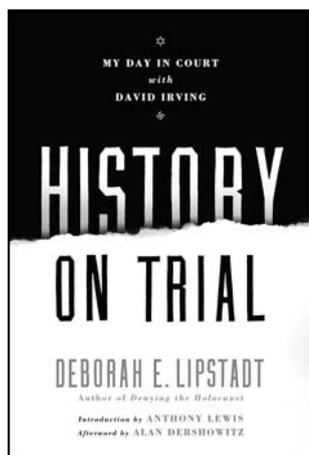
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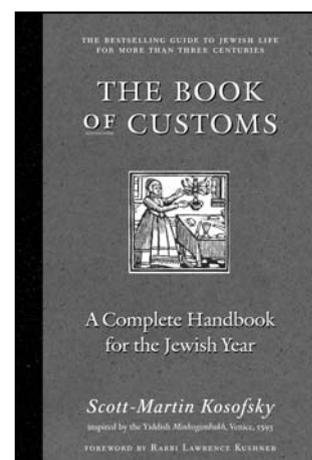
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# JEWES/MEDIA/RELIGION: MAPPING A FIELD, BUILDING A RESOURCE

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett  
Jeffrey Shandler

From Jewish film festivals to the Talmud on CD-ROM, from bar mitzvah videos to Internet Jewish matchmaking services, from *Schindler's List* tours of Cracow to Chabad telethons, Jewish engagements with media now proliferate in unprecedented range and scope. How might scholars in Jewish studies—and in other disciplines—approach the study of this extraordinary array of developments?

For the past year and a half, about forty scholars have been meeting at New York University to address this challenge. Convened at the invitation of NYU's Center for Religion and Media, which is funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Working Group on Jews, Media, and Religion has been mapping out ways to study and teach a wide range of topics that come into focus around the convergence of Jews, media, and religion. To that end, we have been working collaboratively on an open-source, online curricular project called MODIYA ([modiya.nyu.edu](http://modiya.nyu.edu)), which will launch in September 2005.

Given that this subject has received so little scholarly attention, we decided that the group's initial mandate must be—and to a considerable extent still is—one of reconnaissance. What are the phenomena, both historical and contemporary, that this convergence brings into view? How might a concern with religion and media tell us something significant about Jewish life that we might otherwise not consider? What theoretical frameworks and research methods might we use? Given the scope of this topic, our

approach stresses collaboration and draws on the diverse expertise of a large group of scholars, from senior professors to graduate students, in such disciplines as anthropology, sociology, ethnomusicology, folklore, history, and literature. Not all members work primarily on Jewish subjects, nor are they all based in the university; some work in museums or as artists and filmmakers.

Our concern is not simply with media or mediation per se, but with its relation to what might be considered matters of religion, which can include engagement with the numinous, spiritual communion, the transmission and maintenance of religious observance, religiously inflected erudition and authority, ethics and social justice, and the critique of or rebellion against traditional piety, all of which entail some kind of mediating or communicative challenge. Just how, for example, does the production and circulation of sound recordings inform devotional practice in contemporary Orthodox Jewish communities—especially when many of these recordings cannot be made or played on the sacred occasions they portray? How might such an ephemeral medium as the postcard (particularly series of rabbi portraits, synagogues, scenes of the Holy Land, and Jewish types, as well as postcard collecting practices) figure in modern engagements with religious tradition? Over the past century, and especially in our own lifetimes, we have witnessed an unprecedented array of challenges to Jewish life wrought by new media (for example, how *haredim* deal with the Internet) and

new kinds of engagement with established mediations (for example, digitizing of the *responsa* literature).

We have encouraged the working group to cast a wide net for possible subjects of study and approaches to their analysis. In addition to considering what first comes to mind—the use of different media within Jewish religious life (from parchment scrolls to online *hevrutas*) and mediations of Judaism (books, periodicals, films, telecasts, Web sites, exhibitions, and so on, about Jewish religious life, from *The Eternal Light* [an ecumenical TV and radio program produced by the Jewish Theological Seminary and NBC] to Hasidic blogs and *Jewschool* [[www.jewschool.com](http://www.jewschool.com)])—our attention is also drawn to how Jewish involvement with media has been conceptualized in religious terms. For example, attending Jewish film festivals is frequently analogized to going to synagogue, and works of Holocaust remembrance regularly invoke theological engagement through an array of mediating practices.

We take an expansive approach not only to media, but also to religion. Given the problematic fit between religion and the full spectrum of Jewish experience, we look beyond conventional notions of Judaism and Jewish religiosity—prayer, study of sacred texts, synagogue and domestic ritual—to consider phenomena that test the limits of religion, including secular Jewish culture, Jewish civil religion, cultural Judaism, Jewish nationalism, Jewish ethics and social justice, and Holocaust theology, as well as phenomena that address Jewishness from without: anti-Semitism, philo-Semitism, and Judeo-Christian ecumenism.

Our way of working is inductive. Rather than starting with disciplinary rubrics or theoretical approaches (though we of course keep them in mind and return to them in the course of our work), we start with the media phenomena themselves and let them

The screenshot shows the MODIYA website interface. At the top, it says 'MODIYA JEWIS MEDIA RELIGION' with subtext 'portal • association • messenger • correspondent • informant'. The main content area is titled '[ MODIYA ]' and 'Unit: Textual Practices'. It features a video player showing a wedding ceremony with Hebrew text projections. Below the video, there is a caption: "The Huppah in the Sukkah," Toronto, 2003. The avant-garde wedding celebration of video and performance artist Melissa Shiff and media scholar Louis Kaplan included projections of sacred Hebrew texts onto both bride and groom during the ceremony. To the right of the video, there are sections for 'Unit Topics' (1. Jews and their Texts, 2. Historical Perspective, 3. Orality and Writing, 4. Text and Image, 5. Textual Diversity), 'Unit Resources' (Sites, Readings, Media, Museums/Exhibitions, Artists' projects, Class projects, Additional resources, Links), 'Browse Items In:' (Textual Practices, Browse Title, Authors, By Date), 'Comments' (View Posts (1)), and 'Admin Tools' (Edit, Create Topic, Admin Help). On the left side, there is a navigation menu with 'Units' (Anti-Semitism, Bible Films, Blacks and Jews, CyberJews, December, Dilemma, Film Festivals, Haredi Media, Heebsters, Holidays, Holocaust, Home Movies, Israel, Kabbalah, Mediating Ritual, Museums, Music, Postcards, Proselytizing Media, Religious Travel, Textual Practices, Things, Z Temp) and 'General Resources' (Further Readings, Media Resources, Dictionary, Syllabi, Sightings). At the bottom left, there is a search bar and user information for 'tphaine@nyu.edu' with a 'Logout' link.

Screenshot from MORIYA Web site, [modiya.nyu.edu](http://modiya.nyu.edu).

point to whichever theoretical frameworks would best support our exploration of the convergence of Jews/Media/Religion. We draw from established disciplines as well as from such interdisciplinary formations as religious studies, media studies, visual culture studies, and performance studies. Similarly, while we have started with what has been most readily at hand, the contemporary and local, we are moving outward geographically and backward historically and in all cases consider the larger historical and sociocultural contexts of the material under study. For example, we consider contemporary manifestations of “radical Jewish culture,” their media productions (magazines, music, couture, Web sites) and their relationship to the organized Jewish community as part of a larger history of Jewish youth and alternative cultures.

What is emerging from our work is not simply an extensive corpus of phenomena at the intersection of Jews/Media/Religion, but a potentially new approach to Jewish studies, broadly defined. By making the interrelation of media and religion our organizing principle, we are able to bring a heterogeneous array of

to *media practices*. The study of anti-Semitism, for example, is enhanced by shifting attention from political contexts or rhetorical strategies to mediating practices, which have employed state-of-the-art communications media for centuries, from broadsides to Web sites, including the remediation of the blood libel and *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

Accordingly, we approach media works not only as “texts” that can be analyzed semiotically, but also as *social practices* (with respect to their making, circulation, reception, application, adaptation, and remediation). This requires an approach to media works and practices as not only *about* something of interest, but also as something of interest in themselves. For example, we view home movies and videos of life cycle events not merely as sources of information about ritual practice but as playing an intrinsic role in the rituals themselves. Not only are ritual events staged for the camera, but also media are increasingly being incorporated into ritual events, including the viewing of parents’ wedding videos at social gatherings leading up to the wedding of their children or projecting old

phenomena into view. Many of these phenomena have never been studied—or never in quite this way—and considered together they can generate new insights. At the heart of our evolving approach is a concern with the nature of media and mediation and close attention

family photographs during the ceremony itself. We also consider how such practices relate to earlier efforts to incorporate visualizations of ritual into sacred objects and texts, such as early modern illustrated *sifrei minhagim* and remediations of them in our own day.

In this way, we hope to expand the range of phenomena and sources considered in Jewish studies beyond texts to include visual, audio, televisual, cinematic, artifactual, and other kinds of cultural “objects,” while also diversifying approaches to their analysis in order to attend not only to their content, but also to their very nature as media and to the social practices associated with them. In the process, we hope to make the arts, beyond literature and film, a more integral part of Jewish studies. Indeed, we view artistic practices in a wide variety of media as modes of inquiry in their own right and find innovative pedagogical possibilities in the work of contemporary artists.

Working collaboratively, we have discovered a substantial field of scholarly inquiry and the opportunities it affords for curriculum development. This is the *raison d’être* for MODIYA, which we have organized into units such as text and textual practices, religious travel, proselytizing media, *haredi* media, Jews and the Internet—mediating ritual, music, film festivals, and home movies. Each unit is subdivided into topics and case studies, whether a particular site (e.g., Lower East Side Tenement Museum), film (*Eyeshet cohen*, from the Ma’ale School of Television, Film, and the Arts in Jerusalem, which is dedicated “to promoting Jewish religious film production”), or mediations of a single work such as Anne Frank’s *The Diary of a Young Girl*, ranging from Broadway musicals to Japanese animé. For each unit, topic, and case study we provide an introduction; a curated selection of online resources, including primary sources, scholarship, media

(images, audio and video recordings, Web sites), and links to digital archives; suggestions for teaching; ideas for research projects; and thoughts on how elements of MODIYA might be integrated into courses on related subjects.

MODIYA exemplifies a research-centered pedagogy by encouraging research and teaching to proceed in tandem. This is particularly well-suited to the study of emergent phenomena, whether they are new in the world or new to Jewish studies. Consolidating and modeling the working group's way of working, MODIYA is also an experiment in the application of technology to collaborative research and teaching. The ITS Faculty Technology Center at New York University has played a vital role in creatively adapting the DSpace engine developed at MIT ([dspace.org](http://dspace.org)) to suit

our subject and ways of working so that MODIYA might evolve into a working archive of leads, possible directions, explorations, and resources that can grow incrementally.

As an open-source project, MODIYA encourages input from visitors—comments and queries about particular subjects, as well as a place to send us “sightings” of interesting phenomena that are encountered in the course of daily life. We invite all members of AJS to log on, register as users of the site, and help us to develop this resource.

*Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett is University Professor and Professor of Performance Studies at New York University.*

*Jeffrey Shandler is Assistant Professor of Jewish Studies at Rutgers University.*

*Center for Religion and Media ([www.nyu.edu/fas/center/religionandmedia](http://www.nyu.edu/fas/center/religionandmedia)): Co-directors: Faye Ginsburg and Angela Zito, Associate director: Barbara Abrash; ITS Faculty Technology Center: Tal Halpern, Nicola Monat-Jacobs, Joe Lee, Tiphaine B. Rabaux; Working Group on Jews, Media, and Religion: Ilana Abramovitch (Museum of Jewish Heritage), Jonathan Boyarin (University of Kansas), Sally Charnow (Hofstra), Judah Cohen (NYU), Ayala Fader (Fordham), Jeffrey Feldman (NYU), Henry Goldschmidt (Wesleyan), Judith Goldstein (Vassar), Barbara Rose Haum (NYU), Samuel Heilman (City University of New York), Andrew Ingall (The Jewish Museum, NY), Jenna Weissman Joselit (Princeton), Emily Katz (Jewish Theological Seminary), Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (NYU)\*, Mark Kligman (Hebrew Union College, NY), David Koffman (NYU), Rachel Kranson (NYU), Faye Lederman (NYU), Edna Nahshon (Jewish Theological Seminary), Edward Portnoy (Jewish Theological Seminary), Lara Ivry Rabinovitch (NYU), Jeffrey Shandler (Rutgers)\*, Menachem Sheinberger (NYU), Richard Siegel (National Foundation for Jewish Culture), Brigitte Sion (NYU), Mark Slobin (Wesleyan), Jeremy Stolow (McMaster University), Ariva Weintraub (The Jewish Museum, NY)  
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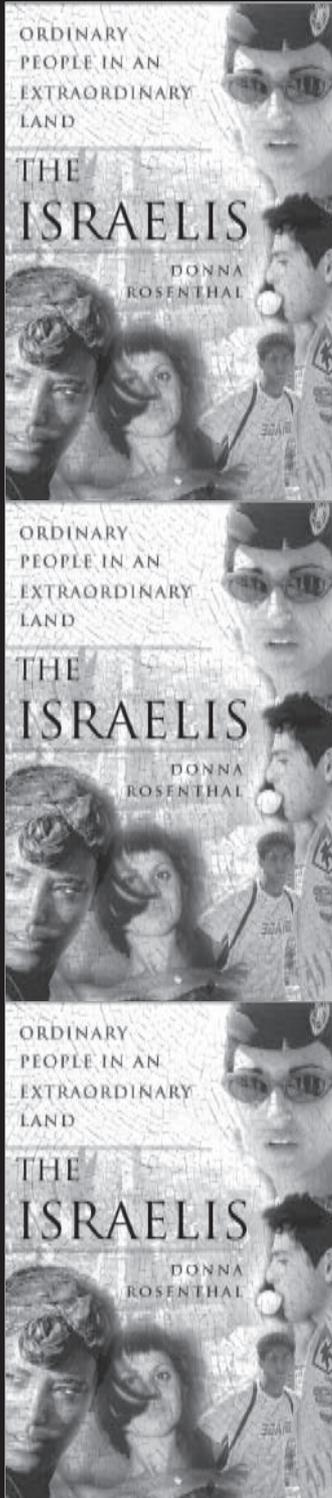
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# THE SECULAR YIDDISH SCHOOLS OF NORTH AMERICA COLLECTION AT STANFORD UNIVERSITY

Zachary M. Baker

The quest to recover the Lost Atlantis of Yiddishland has spawned a host of ambitious and well-publicized initiatives in recent years. Their success was made possible only through the strenuous exertions of grassroots *zamlers*—collectors of books, ephemera, music, and even radio broadcasts—who preserve and make accessible the legacy of a once-vibrant Yiddish culture.

The Friends of the Secular Yiddish Schools in North America (SYSNA) Collection at Stanford University is one of the organizations that is engaged in this effort. Since the early 1990s, this small group has amassed an archival collection that now occupies more than a dozen shelves (forty-two linear feet) in the Stanford University Libraries' Department of Special Collections. Gella Schweid Fishman, an alumna of the Sholem Aleichem schools in New York City, is the guiding force behind the Friends. She and her husband, the sociolinguist Joshua A. Fishman, spend a portion of each academic year at Stanford, which helps to explain why the Friends decided to donate these materials to this university.

From the outset, circa 1910, the Yiddish school movement in the

United States (and to a somewhat lesser extent, Canada) faced the irresistible pull of English, even as it contended with the dominant educational model of religiously oriented Hebrew schools. For some



Students in the second-year class at the Workmen's Circle High School, New York, 1922. Source: *Kinderland*, December 1922. Courtesy of Stanford University Libraries, Department of Special Collections.

Jewish parents, however, the Yiddish shuls' avowedly secularist agenda offered a welcome alternative to having their children attend schools that were often connected to synagogues. By extension, it also relieved these families of the implicit obligation of joining a denomination within American Judaism. The secular Yiddish schools thus embodied a form of humanistic Judaism *avant la lettre*.

Multiple Yiddish school organizations co-existed and competed, each

according to the political ideology of its parent organization. Four movements are represented within the SYSNA collection's holdings, all of them on the political Left: the Labor Zionist *Farband*, the social democratic *Arbeter-ring* (Workmen's Circle), the pro-Soviet International Workers' Order (*Ordn*), and the unaffiliated Sholem Aleichem Folk Institute.

In an article in the Friends' *Shulgrusn* newsletter (2000), Joshua Fishman situates the Yiddish schools in the context of present-day public policy discussions of multiculturalism, bilingual education, and the maintenance of heritage languages. In addition, he underscores the

movement's uniqueness within the American context: "Whereas most ethnic schools focus on maintaining traditional identity" in a new environment, the Secular Yiddish Schools combined a concern for maintaining ties to the Jewish past together with a commitment to the creation of a distinctively new national-secular Jewish identity. He considers the schools' underlying philosophy and their pedagogical methods to be "radically innovative . . . No prior models had existed for such types of schools in Eastern Europe."

Furthermore, Fishman claims that other Jewish educators "borrowed methods and materials [from their Yiddish counterparts] despite mutual ideological opposition."<sup>1</sup>

The alumni, former teachers, parents, and others who donated the Yiddish school materials to Stanford did so long after most of the schools themselves closed. (Only a handful of secular Yiddish schools continue to function in the United States today.) Because these archival remnants belonged to private individuals and

not institutions, the schools' office files are largely absent from the SYSNA collection. On the other hand, it does include hundreds of student compositions, mimeographed curricula and newsletters, music compilations, souvenir journals, yearbooks, children's books and magazines, photographs, and ephemera. Taken as a whole, this archive represents one of a very few bodies of extant material documenting a neglected chapter in the American Jewish experience, one that underscores both the attractions and limitations of secular Jewish culture in North America.

To encourage use of the archive, the Friends sponsor a research fellowship for faculty, graduate students, and college seniors. Esther Reiter, a professor of social sciences and women's studies at York University (Toronto) and an alumna of an *Ordn* school in New York City, was the recipient of the first fellowship in 2002.

The Stanford University Libraries' Department of Special Collections has placed a detailed inventory of the SYSNA collection (M0732) on the Web.<sup>2</sup> In addition to the indexing terms that the library's staff assigns to the collection as a whole, individual folders are searchable according to specific topics that were devised by the collection's organizers. (Examples of these local subject headings include: Creative arts; Obituaries; and Rituals and lifecycle events.)

The tenth anniversary of the Friends' collecting effort was marked by an exhibition at Stanford in January and February 2005. At the exhibition's public opening (January 23, 2005), Ms. Fishman spoke about the origins and growth of this "living archive." In her keynote address, Dr. Sheva Zucker, a graduate of the I. L. Peretz School in Winnipeg and an author of



Cover illustration by Aaron Goodelman, *Kinderland*, January 1923. Courtesy of Stanford University Libraries, Department of Special Collections.

Yiddish textbooks for students and adults, offered her personal reflections on the achievements and failings of the Yiddish school movement.

The items that were selected for the exhibition provide an overview of the secular Yiddish schools' development, activities, contributions, and ideological divisions.<sup>3</sup> These artifacts vividly reflect the degree to which educators viewed themselves and their protégés as participants on the world-historical stage.

For example, the cover illustration of a notebook used in Philadelphia's Workmen's Circle School No. 2, circa 1932, depicts a schoolboy carrying home a loaf of bread. This graphic is accompanied by the slogan, "*Tkh koyf broyt nor mitn yunyon leybel*" [I only buy bread with the union label]. Or, take the May 1939 issue of *Yungvarg*, published by the pro-communist IWO: The cover image, by William Gropper, portrays three children—one white, one black, and one Asian (one girl and two boys)—carrying a banner that proclaims: "*Der ershter may—undzer yontev*" [May First—Our Holiday].

With the passage of time, the distinctive voices of Yiddish teachers and their pupils have largely faded away. However, the subjects and values—and the Yiddish language—that were taught in these schools offer an example of the ways in which Jews have attempted to balance their desire to retain a separate identity while adapting to their surrounding society. As such, the Secular Yiddish Schools in North America collection constitutes both a poignant legacy for the Yiddish-lover and a rich resource for the scholar.

*Zachary Baker is Reinhard Family Curator of Judaica and Hebraica Collections at Stanford University Libraries.*

#### Bibliography

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<sup>1</sup> Joshua A. Fishman, "The Great Contribution of the Secular Yiddish Schools," *Shulgrusn* 1:1 (Winter/Spring 2000): 6. In addition to publishing the *Shulgrusn* newsletter the Friends of the Secular Yiddish Schools in [North] America has its own Web site: [www.fsya.org](http://www.fsya.org).

<sup>2</sup> The finding aid is available through the Online Archive of California: [www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf5c6004gt](http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf5c6004gt).

<sup>3</sup> The exhibition was curated by Gella Schweid Fishman, with the assistance of University Archivist Margaret Kimball and Exhibits Designer Elizabeth Fischbach.

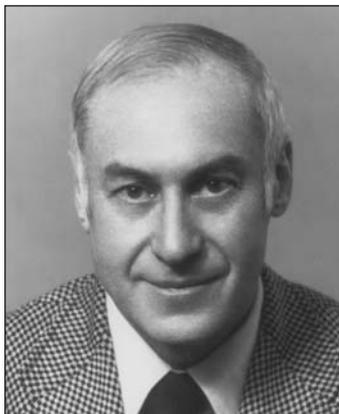
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# WE REMEMBER OUR COLLEAGUES

## ABRAHAM JOSEPH KARP 1921–2003

*Arthur Kiron*



**H**istorian, bibliophile, rabbi, and beloved teacher, Abraham Joseph Karp was one of the giants of the world of the Jewish book and a pioneering scholar of the field of American Jewish history. Born in Indura, Poland, on April 5, 1921, Karp received his early education in Grodno, where he attended a “Tarbut” school that taught Hebrew language and culture. He brought with him to the United States in 1930 a deep love for Judaism and the Jewish people. He graduated from the Teachers Institute of the Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary in New York in 1939, and went on to receive a B.A. from Yeshiva University in 1942, graduating magna cum laude. His rabbinical ordination was conferred on him in 1945 by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, where he was also awarded a Masters in Hebrew Literature in 1948, and an honorary doctorate in 1971. Rabbi Karp married Deborah Burstein in 1945 shortly before graduating from rabbinical school, and they had two sons, Hillel Judah and David Jacob. He served as a congregational rabbi in Kansas City from 1951 to 1956, and in Rochester, New York, at Temple Beth El from 1956 to 1971.

During his student years at the Seminary, Karp came under the lasting tutelage of Alexander Marx, bibliographer of Judaica par excellence, who set him to work cataloguing the distinguished personal library of Professor Ismar Elbogen. He acquired a profound and lifelong love for Jewish books and Judaica of all kinds. His personal collection, the joyous harvest of decades of devoted collecting, consisted of more than 10,000 printed books, including hundreds of rare, early Hebrew imprints, as well as manuscripts and Judaica handicrafts, such as textiles, sculptures, and paintings. His collection of Judaica Americana, today held at the JTS Library, is perhaps the finest private collection of its kind ever assembled.

Rabbi Karp’s collection, and his passion for collecting, became a foundation of his career as a historian. In studying history, Karp emphasized the primary source above all others as the most reliable witness to the past. Each book, each manuscript letter, each newspaper clipping, each scrap of historical evidence he could find became in his hands a kind of detective trail that invariably produced new and significant discoveries. He authored a seminal work about Jacob Joseph, New York’s first “chief rabbi,” was among the first to study Mordecai Manuel Noah in any real depth, and his basic research on the American Synagogue and the American Jewish prayer book was ground-breaking. Perhaps the culmination of his career as a collector and historian was realized when he was invited to curate an exhibition of the Judaica collections at the Library of Congress. The project blossomed into a classic, authoritative bibliophilic treasure entitled “From the Ends of the Earth” (1991), characterized by carefully selected visual artifacts, elegantly written prose, and beautiful final production quality.

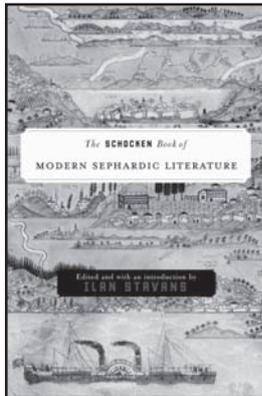
Rabbi Karp held a number of academic positions, including a professorship of history and religion at the University of Rochester, from 1972 until 1991. He also taught as a visiting professor at

Dartmouth College and at the JTS. Karp frequently visited Israel, and served three times as visiting professor of American Jewish history at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem’s Institute for Contemporary Jewry. He retired as the Philip S. Bernstein Professor Emeritus of Jewish Studies at the University of Rochester and moved to Riverdale, New York, in 1991 to serve as the Joseph and Rebecca Mitchell Adjunct Research Professor of American Jewish History and Bibliography at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, until his death on November 24, 2003.

In addition to his academic life, Rabbi Karp also was dedicated to Jewish communal service. He was elected president of the American Jewish Historical Society from 1972 to 1975, and for many years served on the publications committee of the Jewish Publication Society of America, as well as on a variety of editorial and executive boards and advisory councils. Karp was the recipient of numerous honors, including the Lee M. Friedman Medal from the AJHS, and received an honorary doctorate from Gratz College in 1985. He authored, co-authored, and edited more than twenty books and over fifty articles, encyclopedia entries, and reviews. Among his best known works are his five edited volumes, *The American Jewish Experience* (1969), *Beginnings: Early American Judaica* (1975), *Golden Door to America* (1977), *Haven and Home* (1985), *The Jews in America: A Treasury of Art and Literature* (1994), and *Jewish Continuity in America* (1998).

Rabbi Karp frequently spoke about “squeezing” every detail out of a historical source and indeed, the same could be said about his zest for life. Abraham Joseph Karp lived with remarkable energy and passion. His memory surely will be for a blessing.

*Arthur Kiron is Curator of Judaica Collections at the University of Pennsylvania Library.*

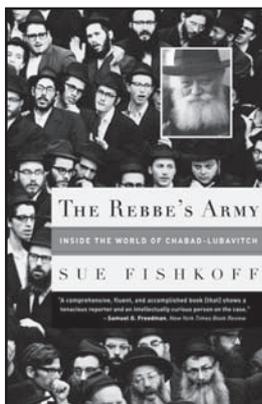


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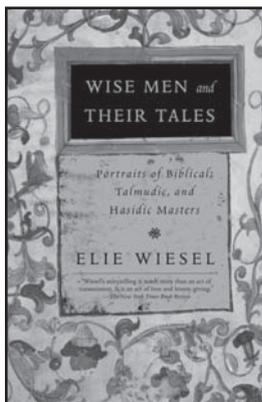
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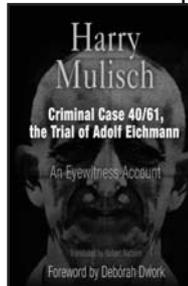
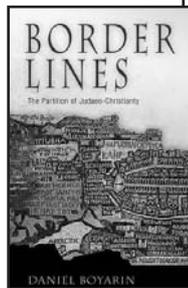
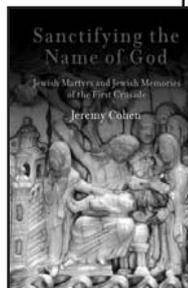
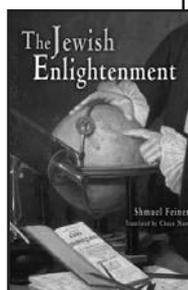
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The conference is the culmination of the 2004-05 fellowship year at the Center for Advanced Judaic Studies and will feature papers by current CAJS fellows as well as other invited speakers. No RSVP is required.

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For further information, please contact Erika Vikström Szulc: [erika.vikstromszulc@sh.se](mailto:erika.vikstromszulc@sh.se).

**A Tribute to the Contributions of Professor David Weiss Halivni**  
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## June 2005

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For further information, please contact Professor Stuart Z. Charmé, Department of Philosophy and Religion, Rutgers University, Camden, NJ 08102; [scharme@rutgers.edu](mailto:scharme@rutgers.edu).

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For further information, please contact Dr. Eleonore Lappin, Institut für Geschichte der Juden in Österreich, Dr. Karl Renner-Promenade 22, A-3100 St. Pölten, Austria; [eleonore.lappin@chello.at](mailto:eleonore.lappin@chello.at).

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## Announcements

The Samuel Rosenthal Center for Judaic Studies at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, along with the Program in Judaic Studies, announces that Judith Neulander has joined the faculty as a visiting professor for the 2004-05 academic year. Her expertise is in Jewish folklore and popular culture. The Rosenthal Visiting Professor for Spring 2005 is Zev Garber, who will teach courses on the Holocaust and the Jewish religious tradition.

The Jewish Studies Program at California State University, Long Beach appointed Arlene Lazarowitz as Program Director and Associate Professor of History, as well as Jeffrey Blutinger as Assistant Program Director and Assistant Professor of History.

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