

AJS Perspectives

THE MAGAZINE OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR JEWISH STUDIES



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Please direct correspondence to:
Association for Jewish Studies
Center for Jewish History
15 West 16th Street
New York, NY 10011

Voice: (917) 606-8249
Fax: (917) 606-8222
E-Mail: ajs@ajs.cjh.org
Web Site: www.ajsnet.org

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From the Editors

Dear Colleagues,

Our first issue as editors of *AJS Perspectives* was on the subject of “translation,” a term that originally referred to the migration of sacred relics from one location to another. With this issue, we likewise reflect on a subject that transforms spatial movement into something more existential, perhaps more threatening, difficult, and electrifying: transgression. We’re not necessarily crossing lines—though perhaps, inspired by the Freedom Issue, we are—but we’re thinking about those who do go beyond the pale, where boundaries come from, and what’s on the other side.

Certainly Jews have historically enjoyed drawing lines, and seeing themselves on one side or the other. In the creation story in Genesis, the deity essentially tidies a cosmic mess, and this drive towards organization—a place for everything and everything in its place—permeates the book of Leviticus, which yields in turn a theology in which crossing a line becomes a sin (*‘averah*). What precisely counts as kosher or treyf, work or leisure, who is neighbor or stranger, who is within the camp and who beyond, may vary, but the importance of the categories themselves, or at least their existence, is rarely questioned, even if only in their breaching.

But transgression can go beyond behavior and shape identity. “Hebrew”—*‘ivri*—means “the one from the other shore” or, colloquially, “the guy from over there.” “There” implies “here,” and somewhere between the two, a line is crossed. “Jew”—that is, Judean, a citizen of Yehud and keeper of its traditions—is likewise a term that only makes sense in exile, outside the borders of the Land. At times, the borders around “Jewish” have been tightly drawn and fiercely guarded; at others, they have been looser and accommodating. But those boundaries of self-definition and other-definition are still enacted by their transgression. There is a sense of limit: if you eat that, think that, do that, you risk stepping beyond the label “Jew” (or at least “good Jew”—for, as it says in the Babylonian Talmud, “even when he [an Israelite] sins, he is still an Israelite” [Sanhedrin 44a], which, really, just begs the question).

This issue takes an expansive, episodic view of transgression. We asked our contributors to consider the idea of transgression broadly: in history, in literature, in the past and in the present, in the private sphere and the public, and where the two converge. We asked them to explore what constitutes transgression, and what some of the

consequences of transgressing may be. We asked them to consider whether Jewish Studies is “too transgressive” or “not transgressive enough,” and in our Forum on Pedagogy we asked colleagues to reflect on how discomfort—for our students or for us—can be pedagogically useful or counterproductive.

Our issue begins with addressing the intersection of the personal and the scholarly: Kavka refers to himself as “the heresy that I am,” while Peskowitz confesses to liking Josephus. Levitt explores the discomfort of “Holocaust relics” while Heller discomfits with his exploration of Jewish terrorism. And, of course, it is those at the margins who most easily cross them. Sisman shares a study of rumors of deviance among the post-Sabbatian Dönmes and Frankists, who existed at the margins of mainstream Judaism; Schainker takes us into nineteenth-century taverns where Jews and Christians intermingled, and intermarried; and Ahuvia brings us back in time even as she focuses on the marginal half the Jewish population—that is, women, embracing the transgressive term, “Jewess”—and their understanding of what others would call magic. Finally, Baskind examines ways in which modern Jewish artists expand the boundaries of Jewishness in art, and Levy offers an example of how “outsiders” may, in fact, be more “insiders” than is comfortable for either supposed side.

Boundaries are often illusory, and yet the idea of transgression—the sense of a line being crossed, by one’s self or another, willfully or by happenstance—can help us articulate precisely those borders that we wish to erase and those we need to redefine or reaffirm. Transgression can be an engine for creativity as well as for controversy, a source of energy as well as approbation. Indeed, at moments such as our present, when forces of conformity and doctrine and ideology speak of building walls and policing boundaries, transgression itself crosses a line from theoretical to practical. But relocation and dislocation are subject for another day.

Jonathan M. Hess

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Laura S. Lieber

Duke University

*The Association for Jewish Studies wishes to thank the
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From the President

Dear Colleagues,

Transgression signifies crossing a line, breaching a barrier. The authors in this thought-provoking issue of *AJS Perspectives* have mused about transgression in diverse ways. Some explored personal transgressions; others consider that the subjects they study, like conversion and sexual impropriety, are, by their very nature, transgressive. While our *Perspectives* authors have talked mostly about the past, I intend to discuss the present.

For some time now, we have all watched the humanities being pushed aside, put on the defensive. Faculty lines in history and literature departments have vanished. At American University, where I have taught for more than thirty years, the provost calls on the faculty to envision areas of strength for the future, and not one of his minyan of topics—starting with neuroscience, big data, game design, and persuasive play—lies in the humanities. The American Historical Association urges revising doctoral training to add skills routinely taught in business school—communication, collaboration, and quantitative literacy—so that our students can better prepare to earn a living when they leave our nests. Calls to eliminate the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts have been renewed.

I know that university curricula have changed dramatically over the centuries. Once Latin, Greek, and the classics of Western Civilization formed its core. Then a generation, clamoring to open the humanities, critiqued their privileging of the works of dead white men. One result: Jewish Studies marched into the academy.

But pushing aside the humanities to make way for game design is not the same as the antipathy currently expressed for the values and methodologies that lie at the core of our humanistic enterprise. This feels new. A line has been crossed; a barrier transgressed.

I am, of course, not the first to make this observation. Leon Botstein, president of Bard College, wrote a few months ago in the *New York Times* that the university, its values, and our scholarly methodologies are under attack. We rest our scholarship on verifiable facts, rational analysis, and reasoned argument. We employ rigorous skepticism. We honor the distinction between truth and falsehood. We insist upon conclusions that follow logically from evidence.

So what can we at AJS do to stem the attack?

In 2013, after serious and thoughtful debate, the AJS Board of Directors amended our mission statement to emphasize that, not

only do we seek to advance Jewish Studies research and teaching at institutions of higher learning, but also added the words “to foster greater understanding of Jewish Studies scholarship among the wider public.”

Now, more than ever, we can no longer afford to remain within our ivory towers, spending our days researching and writing, interrupted only by bouts of teaching and meetings with students and colleagues. We must, as our contribution to the defense of our academic enterprise, share the fruits of our scholarship with wider publics.

Many of us have long engaged the public. My own work included giving more than forty public lectures the year American Jewry celebrated its 350th anniversary and helping create the core exhibition of the National Museum of American Jewish History. Many AJS members have long lists of scholarly interactions with the public.

At AJS we are working to help our members hone skills needed to address audiences outside the university. This summer, thanks to the initiative of AJS Vice President for Membership and Outreach Jeffrey Veidlinger, a dozen AJS members will spend a week with Columbia University Professor Samuel Freedman, the noted *New York Times* journalist, thinking about how to transform scholarly writing to reach audiences beyond the academy. If you missed Michael Carasik’s AJS webinar on creating and promoting podcasts, one of the benefits of your AJS membership is online access to that.

Last December, at the conclusion of our annual conference, our first cohort of Legacy Heritage Fellows, graduate students whose final year of dissertation writing was generously supported by a grant from AJS, met with our colleagues Julia Phillips Cohen and past AJS President Jeffrey Shandler and “The Professor Is In” Karen L. Kelsky to learn how to deliver a public lecture about their dissertations. We expect that the lectures they give this spring will be the first of many opportunities for them to share their scholarship with wider audiences.

At AJS we will continue promoting our members speaking to wider publics. We also remain committed to defending our scholarly enterprise, its values, and its methodologies, in the university and beyond.

Pamela S. Nadell
American University

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AJS's New Executive Director

I take great pride in introducing Dr. Warren Hoffman, the new Executive Director of the Association for Jewish Studies. Dr. Hoffman comes to AJS with more than thirteen years of experience in Jewish Studies, Jewish education, and Jewish cultural programming. The recipient of a doctorate in American Literature from the University of California, Santa Cruz, Warren Hoffman is the author of two scholarly books, *The Great White Way: Race and the Broadway Musical* (2014) and *The Passing Game: Queering Jewish American Culture* (2009). A playwright and the founder of the Philadelphia Jewish Music Festival, he has also taught Jewish Studies and English at St. Joseph's

University, the University of Delaware, Hunter College, and Temple University, where he also sits on the Advisory Board of the Feinstein Center for American Jewish History. I know that our members join me in extending a warm welcome to AJS Executive Director Warren Hoffman.

Pamela S. Nadell
American University
AJS President

From the Executive Director

A Passion for the Public Humanities

Dear Colleagues,

For five years, I served as a Commonwealth Speaker for the Pennsylvania Humanities Council, traveling throughout my home state visiting community centers, public libraries, and senior centers to offer humanities talks on topics that I was passionate about: Jewish culture, Yiddish literature, and musical theater. While I had taught in college classrooms for a number of years and loved being with students, there was something particularly rewarding about taking my love of scholarship and sharing it with a wider community. I was especially flattered when the Pennsylvania Humanities Council asked me to tape my talk “Blacks and Jews on Stage and Screen” in front of a live TV audience for community television. The program was never going to get the ratings of *The Bachelor*, but it was rewarding to share this work with an even larger audience on TV and online.

It's this excitement for both public humanities and traditional scholarship that I bring to the Association for Jewish Studies as its next Executive Director, a role whose challenges humble and excite me. As a scholar of Jewish culture and American literature, I am awed by the pathbreaking and innovative work of our AJS members as they advance our knowledge with new scholarship, and I celebrate our sharing that scholarship in the classroom and with wider audiences. The field of Jewish Studies is extremely strong at the moment and my vision for AJS in the coming years is to find new ways to build on this strength, in collaboration with the AJS Board and our members, and to continue to advance AJS's mission to **“foster greater understanding of Jewish Studies scholarship among the wider public.”**

This commitment to public scholarship and public humanities has been a driving force of my own career. For over five years I was the head of arts and culture for the Gershman Y, a Jewish Community

Center in the heart of Philadelphia, where I programmed dozens of book talks, panel discussions, and classes on a wide variety of Jewish topics. What I came to realize working outside of the academic world is that there is a large lay audience that is searching for thought-provoking educational programming that will engage them and teach them something new. As a graduate student and later as a professor in classrooms of my own, I was excited by the scholarly books I would read and the talks I would attend, but was also interested in learning how to translate those ideas to lay audiences who might not have had specialized academic training. This ability to “code-switch” between these modes of communication is a necessary skill in the twenty-first century, an area where I hope AJS can offer more guidance and training in the future. Most importantly, I want to make sure that the stimulating, thought-provoking work that our members produce finds reception outside the walls of the academy, contributing to a world where the humanities can be celebrated and enjoyed by people of all backgrounds and educational levels. Because, at least for me, that was always my driving force in becoming a teacher and scholar: to open the minds of others and have impact on how our society thinks about topics such as identity, history, memory, and culture.

I look forward to meeting and working with all of you in the coming months, especially at this year's annual conference in Washington DC at the Marriott Marquis. Until then, I hope to hear from you, our members, and look forward to our many conversations in the years ahead. Feel free to reach out to me at whoffman@ajs.cjh.org.

Warren Hoffman
Association for Jewish Studies

The Transgression Issue

“TRANSGRESSION IN THE FIELD”

The Heresy of Jewish Philosophy

Martin Kavka

I wish I could recover what it felt like at that moment, almost two decades ago.

In 1998, I attended the AJS annual meeting for the first time. As a bright-eyed graduate student, I attended all the panels I could. And so on the Monday evening of that conference, I was one of scores of scholars in the audience for a plenary panel entitled “The State of Israel and Jewish Studies around the World: On Israel’s Fiftieth Birthday.” While the program from that year lists four speakers, two of the papers have lodged permanently in my mind: those on the purpose and nature of Jewish Studies by Hava Tirosh-Samuelsan, filling in for an absent Yael Feldman, and by Elliot Wolfson. (Tirosh-Samuelsan was kind enough to send me a copy of her remarks, which were never published. An expanded version of Wolfson’s remarks appeared in *AJS Perspectives* in 2001.)

Although neither of these two papers used the words “transgressive” or “transgression,” their arguments tackled the issue of just how transgressive Jewish Studies was—and ought to be—as an academic field. Tirosh-Samuelsan cautioned the audience against making Jewish Studies an academic field just like any other. In a call that some today might deem to have been prophetic, she proclaimed that “if we continue to do business as we imagine corporations go about theirs, we will find ourselves in larger and larger academic conferences with more and more sessions and papers, but we will write them for ourselves while at the same time writing ourselves off the map of Jewish life.” What was needed instead was for Jewish Studies scholars to “highlight the religious dimension of our life-long intellectual commitments” so that Jews might take up the activity of learning about the Jewish past. Tirosh-Samuelsan did not say this openly, but her stance at that time—she may very well have changed her mind in the last two decades!—implicitly



Photo by Jenna Post via Flickr Commons.

assumed that Jewish Studies scholarship was for Jews and for Jews alone.

But if Tirosh-Samuelsan wanted Jewish Studies to transgress the norms of the secularized Christian university, Wolfson wanted academic Jewish Studies to transgress its own history and cast off the weight of the decades when Jewish Studies scholars were themselves Jews. When non-Jewish scholars of Judaism would join the community of Jewish Studies scholars, this would mark the worthiness of Jewish Studies in the university. It would grant Jewish Studies a kind of honor about which Tirosh-Samuelsan did not seem to care, for in Wolfson’s view (again, at least at that time) “the study of Judaism by someone completely outside of that culture is the ultimate litmus test of the success of Jewish studies within the academy.” Still, not unlike Tirosh-Samuelsan, Wolfson too seemed to describe the future of

Jewish Studies in somewhat spiritual terms. In 1998, he thought that a Jewish Studies scholarly community that included both Jews and non-Jews would perhaps better be able to heed the sacred texts of the past. The multiplicity of interpretations would compel “us to hear the word again and again as if we were hearing it for the first time.”

If I no longer remember what it felt like to hear these papers, it might be because both of them touched what were at that time deep-seated aspects of my identity. In 1998, I identified as Jewish, both in the ethnic and religious senses of that adjective. Shortly after I began preparing to convert to Judaism in the mid-1990s, my sister and I visited relatives in Prague, where my mother’s brother’s ex-wife’s new husband—got that?—told us a story about the secret Jewish identity of my mother’s maternal ancestors. And so I had already reached my telos without knowing

it. Why should I continue to prepare to convert? As a Jew, I was now the explicit audience of Tirosh-Samuelson's paper. Still, as someone who was deeply unsure of how to perform my newfound Jewish identity, as a graduate student, as an outsider to the yeshivish I heard in the halls of the Westin Copley Place, and as a gay scholar in what was at the time a far more heteronormative AJS, I also felt a deep exhilaration in hearing Wolfson's description of the importance of having non-Jews within Jewish Studies.

In the last two decades, I have ceased to identify as Jewish. My belief in God, and my belief in belief, were extirpated when I became a widower in 2007. In the late 2000s, an archivist in Brno cast doubt on my ethnicity when he pronounced my mother's family story unverifiable, for her relatives are marked as baptized Catholics and are buried in Catholic cemeteries. For reasons that I prefer not to know, my mother began the process of converting to Judaism after she discovered this. I, however, had tired of identifying. Or perhaps I had tired of passing. Or perhaps I had just tired of hoping that my

Slavic last name, which is not specifically Jewish, would do the passing for me. Today, I would much rather think about Hermann Cohen, or S. Yizhar, or Rabban Gamaliel, than about myself. Still, those papers from 1998 remain in my mind, and I think about Tirosh-Samuelson and Wolfson every time a student kindly demands that I identify myself, by asking me whether I am Jewish. I think of them every time I answer that student by saying that as a scholar who sojourns with the Jewish theological and philosophical tradition, and with Jewish philosophers and theologians, the most apt word (but certainly not the ideal word) for me is the Hebrew term *ger*, in its biblical sense of "fellow traveler."

Those papers still call to me. Now they no longer demand that I identify myself. But they do demand that I identify the stakes of my thinking. When I give a lecture or teach a class, do I not want some kind of commitment on the part of my audience, of the kind that Tirosh-Samuelson described? When I read a talmudic text with a group of students, do I not desire that they hear this text anew, as Wolfson demanded? Where

does the boundary lie between the religious and the secular performance of these desires, anyway? And how, all these years later, can I pick between these two eminent scholars? To side with Tirosh-Samuelson is to transgress the bounds of the university; to side with Wolfson is to acknowledge that Jewish tradition is nothing but a series of transgressions. There can be no thinking of a path out from this double bind that doesn't involve one transgression or another.

These papers now, together, call me to imagine Jewish philosophy, the field of study I share with both Tirosh-Samuelson and Wolfson, as a home for transgression and transgressiveness. This is the heresy that I write. This is the heresy that I am.

Martin Kavka is professor of Religion at Florida State University. He is the author of Jewish Messianism and the History of Philosophy (Cambridge, 2004), which was awarded the Jordan Schnitzer Book Award in Philosophy and Jewish Thought by AJS in 2008. He is also the coeditor of four monographs, as well as the Journal of Religious Ethics.

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Meeting Josephus Head On and Humanly, a Historian's Transgression

Miriam Peskowitz

Perhaps the most transgressive thing historians of the Jews and Judaism can say is that they like Josephus, author of *The Jewish War*, about the First Judean Revolt against Rome, completed around 75 CE, and *Antiquities of the Jews*, a massive account of Jewish history completed about twenty years later. Josephus is the ultimate bad boy, traitor, turncoat of Jewish history. An “apologist” who wrote in Latin and Greek, he’s untrustworthy as a person and unreliable as a historian, we’re told. In the entire span of Jewish and human history, it would seem, one cannot find a historian worse than Josephus Flavius. Without Josephus’s writing, however, we’d know nearly nothing about several centuries of Jewish history. Still, when hearing Josephus’s name, grown scholars, serious women and men, allow their eyebrows to crease, their lips to purse. It’s like, well, if you mention Hillary Clinton without immediately assuring everyone in sight that “of course she was a very flawed candidate.” You can discuss Herod, the horrific Roman-appointed king of the Jews, and eyes will roll, or Haman, and well, we know what happens when Haman’s name comes up. But refer to Josephus in polite academic company, and you’ll see: both the ancient writer and you will become objects of scorn.

And yet, I find myself thinking again about Josephus, and in more humanizing terms.

Most of us learn about Josephus not in daily life or ritual but in formal Jewish Studies coursework, so it’s worth reflecting on our experiences of introduction. Mine? Sitting in a professor’s office in Grey Building, a sunlit office next to the neo-Gothic Duke Chapel. We translated Josephus from the Greek, line by line. There was no biography, no context. We just translated the Greek sentences and talked about grammar. There was a general knowing wave of the arm toward his untrustworthiness. In Religious Studies, a certain kind of liberal scholar is most terrified of the word “apologist.” Jewish Studies scholars have for centuries needed to turn somersaults to prove themselves as objective historians, untarnished by their own religious or ethnic leanings. As one of the few figures of overlap between Jewish

and Christian Studies, Josephus has taken the brunt of all of this discursive uncertainty. Everyone gains, it seems, by scorning him.

It’s also the case that Josephus’s biography and his writings are situated at the intersection of cultural conflict and identity, as are many scholars. If you haven’t embodied notions of hybridity and the multicultural, if you tend to lean toward singular communities and away from the intellectual imaginarium of a globalized, motion-filled world, then Josephus’s complexity, his ability to overlap and live in several worlds, and additionally, his veering away from Jewish militarism won’t seem like merits.

If you’re able, though, to consider the ancient first century differently, to imagine what it sounded like, to reconsider the complexities of identity, and to consider what the emotional world that created everything from early Christianity to the rabbinic movement may have felt like, then Josephus becomes quite interesting. This is the heart of my historian’s transgression: to meet Josephus head on and humanly. Look around. He’s the dude with his heart on his sleeve. If you actually read his writing, this becomes easier and easier to see. Josephus has gotten a bad rap for living between two cultures, for not being a pure Jewish rebel. I disagree, really. I think much of our best work comes from living at the margins and in multiple uncomfortable places.

Josephus was born Yosef ben Mattityahu in Jerusalem in the early first century CE. For

most of his teens and twenties he was a bit of an aristocratic fop, popping between Rome and Jerusalem, hanging with the ruling-class sons of both cities. The First Jewish Revolt changed everything. Josephus was given a command, and then left his command. He was a moderate, and he was drafted to work as a translator for the Romans.

When the war was over, Jerusalem was burning, and Jews from Judea were refugees, displaced from their homes, some taken as slaves. Now in his thirties, Josephus sailed to Rome, and for his work was given a pension and an apartment. Yosef ben Mattityahu now became Titus Flavius Josephus.

After the trauma of the revolt, Josephus was never the same. This is when Josephus became a writer, which he hadn’t been before the war. He found a good source for papyrus pages, gathered pen and ink and whatever notes and histories he could find. In his apartment, supported by his Roman pension, he began to feverishly write the history of the Jewish War. He wrote and wrote, unable to move on in life until the words lined up on the page, until the whole bloody, sad story was told. Josephus was no Herodotus, happily meandering through time and space to gather curious anecdotes about humanity. This was history at the hand of a man who married and divorced over and over, never again happy, never again able to relax and live in ease. It is the writing of a man who is wishing his people and places back into life, and grabbing words, one after another, to make it happen.



Vespasian sestertius “Judea Capta” issue, 71 CE. Classical Numismatic Group, Inc. via Wikimedia Commons.

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After *The Jewish War* was complete, Josephus turned to a much bigger project, a fierce act where memory and historian's passion meet. He would write the history of the Jews, who'd never had their history told in quite this way, especially for the period after the biblical books end. Josephus gathered notes, especially the pages of Nicolas of Damascus's *Universal History*. Nicolas had been secretary to King Herod in Jerusalem, and had penned copious notes on everything he could.

Josephus spent decades writing about destruction. He'd witnessed the triumph in Rome. He saw the Arch of Titus with its carved images of Romans carrying away the holy objects from the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. He would have seen the coins that circulated, the way they always did after Rome vanquished another nation: "Iudea Capta," the caption read, encircling an image of a woman sitting against and tied to a palm tree, literally, visually, Judea Captured. Everything was gone, and still, Josephus wrote and wrote about the vanquished Jews, reanimating them. Without him, we'd have four relatively blank centuries of Jewish life in Judea and elsewhere, from 300 BCE to nearly 100 CE, to add to the other times and places about which we know so little.

Josephus wrote two smaller pieces, his *Vita*, and *Against Apion*.

Even though he was married and had several children and a nice apartment paid for by Rome, he was never at ease. Some Jews called him a traitor because he didn't want to fight, but I see these years of his life as a fight on other terms. No one in his circle of intellectuals believed as he did that the Jews had much a history to be proud of. They were, again, a defeated and exiled people. Apion was a philosopher and historian from Alexandria, where many Jews lived among the Egyptians, and had, for centuries. Josephus felt that Apion's book *History of Egypt* slandered the Jews, and he gave voice to what he knew, even if it has sounded to us like meek apology. "The Jews have introduced to the rest of the world," Josephus writes, "a very large number of beautiful ideas." Josephus was not creating the terms of the conversation. He was providing the narrowest path through which the history, presence, lived-ness of the Jews could step, even gingerly, into the historical record, could make it into the centuries ahead.

Josephus's own world closed its ears to the exiled historian's call. Just a few years later, the historian Tacitus finished his magnum opus, the *Histories*, which includes the Roman siege of Jerusalem and the year 69 in Roman history, a terrible year, in which Rome went through four emperors: Nero, Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, and then,

Vespasian, the first of the Flavians. Josephus must have been despondent that his writing couldn't change Tacitus's mind: the *Histories* used all the anti-Jewish sources that Josephus had tried to discredit.

Josephus's Jerusalem and Judea were destroyed, Jewish people were spread out everywhere, sometimes free, sometimes enslaved. He alone, it turns out, had the capacity to reach into the past and commit the Jewish stories to the written word. He believed in the Judean and Jewish past, in accomplishments and ordinariness, in the specialness of the Jewish Torah and in the unremarkable, just-like-everyone-else, quality of the Maccabean and Herodian royal families. It didn't matter that the Jews hadn't produced philosophers as Greece had or military legions like Rome. They were his people, they'd been destroyed, and it was going to be by his hand that they'd be saved, finally and for all time.

Miriam Peskowitz is the New York Times bestselling author of The Daring Book for Girls, as well as of the academic books Spinning Fantasies: Rabbis, Gender, and History (University of California Press, 1997) and with Laura Levitt, Judaism since Gender (Routledge, 1997). This essay comes from a work in progress about the ancient Judean queen Salome Alexandra and her historian, Josephus.



"Bas-relief from the Arch of Titus." Reprinted from John Kitto. *The Pictorial History of Palestine and the Holy Land including a Complete History of the Jews*, vol. 1. (London C. Knight, 1844), p. 266. Internet Archive Book Images via Flickr Commons.



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“SACRED COWS”

The Rites and Rituals of Holding: Revisiting a Holocaust Transgression

Laura S. Levitt



A soldier dips his hands into a crate full of rings confiscated from prisoners in Buchenwald [Thuringia], Germany, found by American troops in a cave adjoining the concentration camp. May 5, 1945. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park.

To transgress is to violate a law, a command, or a duty. According to *Merriam-Webster*, a transgression is such an act or instance of this kind of offense. This is the most common understanding. But what draws my attention is the second definition, where we learn that a transgression is “the spread of the sea over land areas and the consequent uncomformable deposit of sediments on older rock.” Here the breach is physical. It leaves its mark. “Uncomformity,” a key term in this materialized definition of transgression, has everything to do with sedimentation. It suggests “a lack of continuity in deposition between rock strata in contact corresponding to a period of nondeposition,

weathering, or erosion.” It refers to the “surface contact” between these strata, a kind of disconnect and its traces. The barrier is broken. Even when the water recedes the coast it is never quite the same.

I begin by emphasizing the materiality of transgression in order to get closer to the kinds of refusal I hope to consider in relation to Holocaust studies. Scholars like the Israeli philosopher Adi Ophir have challenged the “sanctification” of the Holocaust, going so far as to write an “anti-theological treatise” about the dangers of such forms of reverence. Early on, even Jacob Neusner warned against “the myth of Holocaust and Redemption.” Still, there is no

going back. Various forms of sanctification have already left their mark even as many of us have attempted to resist their allures. With this in mind, I want to consider a different layer of this legacy. I want to think more concretely about the residue that these discourses have left. I am interested in the perhaps less-than-conscious rituals that animate our engagements with Holocaust objects. Although I am compelled by critiques of theological versions of Holocaust sanctification, I want to risk deploying religious discourse otherwise in order to appreciate more fully the work of holding this past in the acts of caring for and preserving Holocaust objects.

When it comes to artifacts, this transgression takes a somewhat different form. It is more closely aligned with the kinds of discomfort around aesthetic objects and works of art and architecture that are, as Brett Kaplan has written, “unwanted.” Here the prohibition is about containing the power of offensive objects. And yet, even these barriers do not stop the kinds of affective engagements such works nevertheless produce. Prohibitions cannot stop these engagements, they only seem to send them underground.

Entering the Holocaust archive and its holdings, I want to consider what it might mean to actually allow ourselves to use religious language to address the materials that embody this legacy. To make my case, I build on Oren Stier’s notion of Holocaust “icons” and “relics” and religious studies scholar Jennifer Scheper Hughes’s account of the agency of sacred “object-entities.” With them, I argue that a more robust engagement with religious discourse, a discourse that has historically appreciated the animating character of objects as we interact with them, can enable us to address more fully the vibrancy of Holocaust artifacts and their hold on us.

In my larger project, I consider both those material artifacts housed in Holocaust museums such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) and those held in police storage facilities as evidence of specific violent crimes, especially rape and murder. What does it mean to hold once-ordinary pieces of clothing, bedding, a suitcase, or a toothbrush in custody? What do these strangely bristling objects have to tell us about the crimes they witnessed? What are our obligations to them in an ever-changing present?

The common rationale for why we hold such objects is that they can be deployed as evidence. They enable us to prosecute those responsible for such crimes in legal trials and tribunals and in the historical record. But most of what is held in Holocaust collections is not legal tender. The allure of these objects exceeds this kind of use value and cannot account for the tender regard that permeates their ongoing care.

What attracts us to the smell of decaying shoes in the permanent exhibit of the USHMM, the fragile materiality of those striped concentration camp uniforms, or the poet Maggie Nelson’s account of a bloodied pair of pantyhose used to strangle Jane Mixer, a law student at the University

of Michigan murdered in 1969 whose case was reopened over thirty years later after a one-in-a-million DNA match? In all of these instances material objects speak, they call out to us in ways not contained by the more overt narratives of criminal evidence. Such tainted objects beckon. And so it is that I have been wrestling with the question of how these otherwise lifeless objects move us, how they demand our tender regard.

Writing about Mexican devotional practices, Jennifer Hughes refuses the instrumental logic of objects as evidence. Insisting on the vibrant agency of religious artifacts, she propels me to dig deeper into why it is that I find myself so obsessed with once-ordinary possessions transformed by violence. With this in mind, I see such Holocaust objects as strangely sacred. In other words, as Stier shows us, in places like the USHMM, the language of a kind of Christian material and visual culture, icons and relics, helps flesh out a process of contemporary Jewish communal commemoration.

Even as these same efforts are resisted by so many of us in Jewish Studies as sacrosanct, this kind of religious language animates these affective engagements increasingly with objects. And these practices are everywhere apparent in efforts to preserve Holocaust memory in its materiality.

Stier was among the earliest scholars of Holocaust memory to move from textual study not only to monuments and memorials but to the enactment of memory through ritual and performance as well as museum exhibitions. In his most recent work Stier uses material, numerical, rhetorical, and both written and photographic “icons” to link picture theory with scholarly work on religious icons. By noticing how religious icons cross genre boundaries, he shows us how they make accessible that which remains otherwise just out of reach—the less-than-articulate animating qualities of these objects and figures. What role does ritual play in the display of various sacred objects—religious and otherwise—at the USHMM? By offering an account of the complicated halakhic considerations that went into the museum’s display of a desecrated Torah, for example, Stier points to the rituals that surround all of our engagements with the museum’s rescued evidence.

Writing about the question of “evidence” in the study of North American religion, Jennifer Hughes writes about a kind of shared religion-affective posture of tender regard for mundane objects imbued with

life. She insists that such objects are engaged as sacred persons. They are beings and not things. For Hughes, these object-entities are vital and dynamic. They are agents in these communities, “material manifestations of the sacred, to whom devotees and practitioners attribute *animus*—existence, being, desire, and potency. They possess a ‘vital materiality.’” Following Hughes, I want to suggest that Holocaust objects are similarly animate.

Explaining some of the reasons why so many scholars bristle at these kinds of claims, nevertheless, I, like Hughes, want to insist that sacred objects are not passive vessels to be used for some other purpose like the terms fetish and animism presume. Such “object-entities” are not narrowly, and certainly not exclusively, “evidence”; rather, they are “active participants in the complex religion-social networks that ethnographers of religion observe and describe.” Hughes continues “Objects performing as evidence do so through the ‘prerogative of power.’” Given all of this, like Hughes, I am interested in deploying “vital materialist ontologies” in order to better attend to the bristling objects held in Holocaust museums and their power over us.

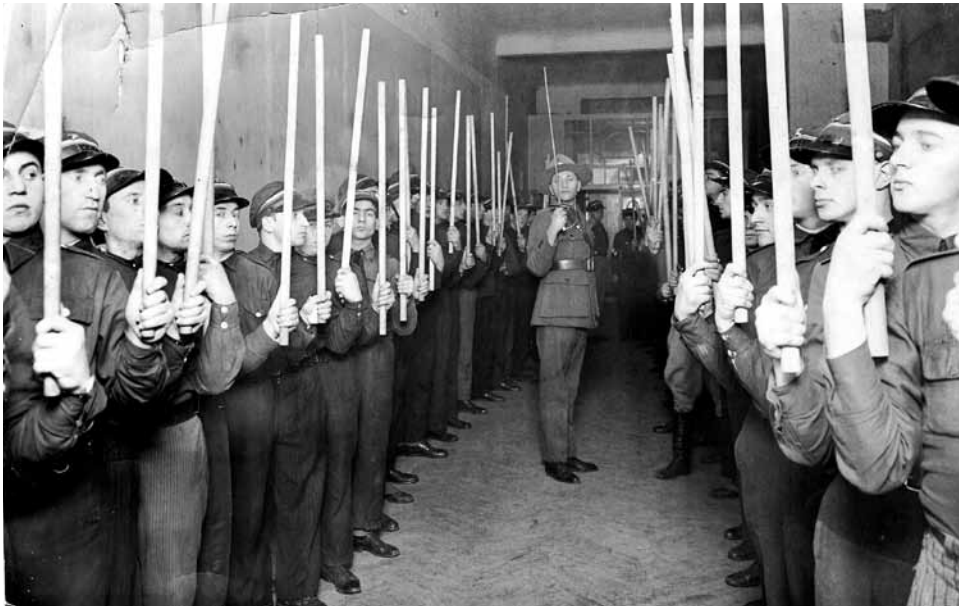
Let me say this differently: in order to better appreciate the vitality of presumably lifeless Holocaust objects, I suggest we stay with Hughes and Stier and more fully embrace the rites and rituals of those who hold them, the ongoing labors of conservation and custody as sacred practices. To do this, we have to acknowledge that the prohibition on religious discourse in Holocaust studies has already been breached. There is no turning back. To touch these powerful enactments and their ongoing importance, we need to work with the unconformable deposits of the sacred that already mark such collections and their care.

Laura S. Levitt is professor of Religion, Jewish Studies and Gender at Temple University and the author of American Jewish Loss after the Holocaust (New York University Press, 2007). Her current project, “Evidence as Archive,” considers the relationship between material objects held in police storage and artifacts housed in Holocaust collections.

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The Jewish User's Guide to Terror and Retaliation

Daniel Kupfert Heller



Yirmiyahu Halperin (1901–1962) poses with Betar leaders in Warsaw 1932. Courtesy of the Jabotinsky Institute in Israel.

On November 11, 1937, a bomb packed with iron shards and nails tore through a narrow side street in Jerusalem, killing two Arab bystanders. With the explosion, the right-wing Zionist terrorist group known as the Irgun Zva'i Le'umi (National Military Organization) proclaimed its opposition to the policy of self-restraint (*havlagah*) promoted by most of Mandate Palestine's Zionist leadership at the start of the Arab Revolt (1936–1939). While the Irgun's opponents accused the group of transgressing the ethical principles of the Zionist movement, its members, drawn mostly from the Revisionist faction of the Zionist movement established by Vladimir Jabotinsky, insisted that terrorist attacks by Palestinian Arabs on Jewish civilians would only cease if Jews responded in kind. Along with its splinter group (and sometimes rival) Lehi, the Irgun's terrorist activity against Mandate Palestine's Arab population, and later, its British rulers, helped end British control over Palestine and hastened the emergence of the State of Israel.

While the activity of these groups is well known, more surprising, perhaps, is the moment and location where right-wing Zionists began to make a case for terrorism and develop a plan to carry out acts of radical violence. It was in Warsaw, not Tel Aviv or Jerusalem, that a blueprint

for right-wing Zionist terrorist activity first appeared. Its author, Yirmiyahu Halperin (1901–1962), was provoked by events in Europe, not Mandate Palestine, to write his user's guide to terror and retaliation.

Born in Smolensk but raised in Ottoman Palestine, Halperin was a prominent military instructor for Betar, the Revisionist faction's popular youth movement. In 1931, Jabotinsky urged him to travel to Poland, the Revisionist movement's heartland, and serve as the director of Betar's military training program. Over the course of three years, Halperin organized military courses for Betar branches across central and eastern Europe, led a Revisionist veterans' association (Brit Ha-ḥayal), and in 1934, founded the youth movement's naval academy in Italy. His students idolized him for his rugged physical features, stern demeanor, and reputation as a fearless fighter alongside Jabotinsky during the 1920 Jerusalem riots.

Halperin's arrival to Warsaw in 1931 coincided with a rise in violent antisemitic attacks on university campuses in Poland, Austria, Germany, Romania, and Hungary. Betar members insisted to him that their only option was to launch mass protests in the hope that world leaders would take notice and put pressure on Europe's governments to intervene. Horrified by their

reaction, he quipped that their tactics fit comfortably with the longstanding Jewish tradition to "suffer quietly and shut up."

During his first two years in Europe, Halperin had remained begrudgingly faithful to Jabotinsky's public statements on the purpose of Betar's military program. The youth movement's goal, Jabotinsky insisted, was to train chivalrous soldiers for the Zionist cause who would abide by a strict ethical code and only resort to violence in the name of self-defense. Hitler's rise to power and the persistent anti-Jewish violence on university campuses across Europe convinced Halperin to change course.

In the spring of 1933, he published a radical new manifesto in Poland's weekly Betar newspaper. Its title was "Defense through Attack." Drawing attention to the plight of young Jews on European university campuses, Halperin insisted that protests were useless. Even Jewish self-defense groups, he continued, would not deter antisemitic rioters. There was only one option: launch retaliatory attacks. Only when antisemites trembled at the thought of being maimed or killed by groups of vigilante Jews would they think twice about committing an attack.

Several months later, Halperin followed his manifesto with a guidebook in Hebrew devoted to the techniques of guerilla fighting. Published in Warsaw, it provided detailed instructions for forming an underground cell; using knives, grenades, and guns; catching opponents by surprise in streets, alleyways, and homes; and vanishing into a crowd after committing an attack. Halperin also stressed the power of using theatrical techniques to surprise one's enemies and generate publicity. No matter how well armed or numerous their opponents were, young Jews could reduce them to panic and "fear in the presence of terror" if they wore masks and shouted distinctive rallying cries. In the closing pages of the guidebook, Halperin urged them to "double their fulfillment" of a well-known biblical commandment on retribution. In his rendition, the commandment read: "two eyes for one eye, and two teeth for one tooth."

Halperin's guidebook is not only striking because it is the first instruction manual published by a Zionist organization to promote fighting techniques associated with terrorism. It also highlights how

conversations among Zionists about their use of force in Mandate Palestine were inextricably connected to their conversations about anti-Jewish violence in Europe. Halperin saw little need in his guidebook to specify where Betar members should engage in battle. At several points in the text, he would move abruptly from an example of anti-Jewish violence in Europe to one in Mandate Palestine. His descriptions of Jewish retaliation strategies similarly blurred the lines between the Yishuv and Europe.

To what extent did right-wing Zionists embrace Halperin's belief that violence against Jews, no matter their location, merited the same response? During the Arab Revolt, nearly all of the Revisionist movement's leadership echoed his call to fight terror with terror on the streets of Mandate Palestine. But Poland was another matter altogether. Just days before the outbreak of the revolt in April 1936, Jabotinsky began his courtship with the Polish government, seeking military and diplomatic aid for the Revisionist movement's activity in Mandate Palestine. His overtures to the government, which proved fruitful for a time, impacted the extent to which Revisionist leaders responded to antisemitic violence perpetrated by Polish nationalists. Well aware that the Polish government forbade the formation of armed Jewish groups to combat anti-Jewish violence, Revisionist leaders were careful to avoid any public discussion of instances in which their

members defied government regulations. Readers of the Revisionist movement's press were far more likely instead to find articles showcasing the similarities between the Zionist and Polish quest for national liberation, and the readiness of right-wing Zionist youth to defend Poland's borders.

Members of Betar, however, tell a different story. Writing in memorial anthologies (*yizker bikher*) dedicated to Jewish communities destroyed during the Holocaust, former Betar leaders in Poland recounted their decision in the 1930s to form armed squads to combat anti-Jewish rioters, and in doing so, reject the "Polish-Jewish alliance" peddled by their superiors to Poland's government officials. Halperin's guidebook was even cited by some as an inspiration. Describing his efforts in 1938 to form an armed group to confront antisemitic rioters in Tomaszów Mazowiecki, Leon Markowicz noted that Halperin's guidebook not only taught him "how to organize the defense of settlements . . . in the Land of Israel, but also how to organize self-defense from rioters in the Diaspora." Recounting an incident in which Betar members stabbed and critically wounded two Polish rioters in the town of Luboml, Ya'akov Hetman echoed Halperin's call for retaliatory attacks; "It was obvious," he wrote, "that we had to 'pay back' the attackers."

These accounts, written decades later, have to be read with tremendous caution. Many memorial anthologies were published



Betar members in Austria participating in Yirmiyahu Halperin's (1901–1962) Military Instruction Course, 1932. Courtesy of the Jabotinsky Institute in Israel.

decades after the historical events they describe. Their accounts of the past bear the imprint of the trauma of the Holocaust, nostalgia for a "vanished world," as well as the political and religious commitments of their authors. At the very least, they alert historians to the dangers of presuming that the ideological declarations of Revisionist leaders accurately reflected the beliefs and behaviors of their followers. Right-wing Zionist leaders may have touted their use of retaliatory violence in Mandate Palestine as the ultimate transgression of the rules followed by mainstream Zionist organizations. When it came to Poland, however, the decision of some Betar members to retaliate against antisemitic rioters proved to be a transgression directed against their very movement's leadership.

Daniel Kupfert Heller is an assistant professor in the Department of Jewish Studies at McGill University. His book, Jabotinsky's Children: Polish Jews and the Rise of Right-Wing Zionism, will appear with Princeton University Press in the summer of 2017. His articles have appeared in Journal of Israeli History and Kwartalnik Historii Żydów (Jewish History Quarterly).



Yirmiyahu Halperin (1901–1962), Betar's coordinator for military training, supervises a course for Betar leaders in Austria, 1932. Courtesy of the Jabotinsky Institute in Israel.



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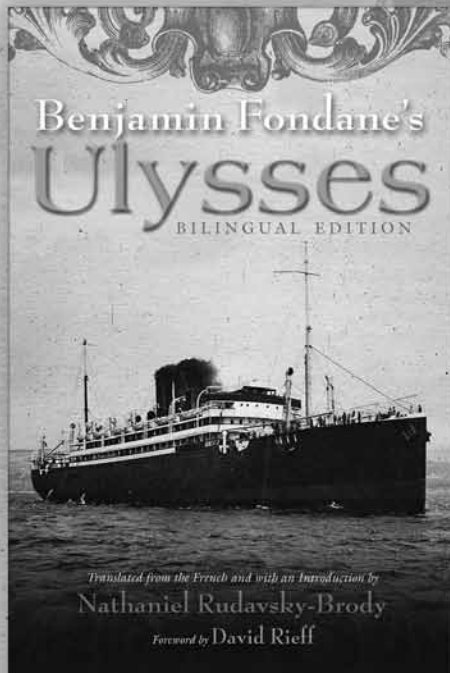
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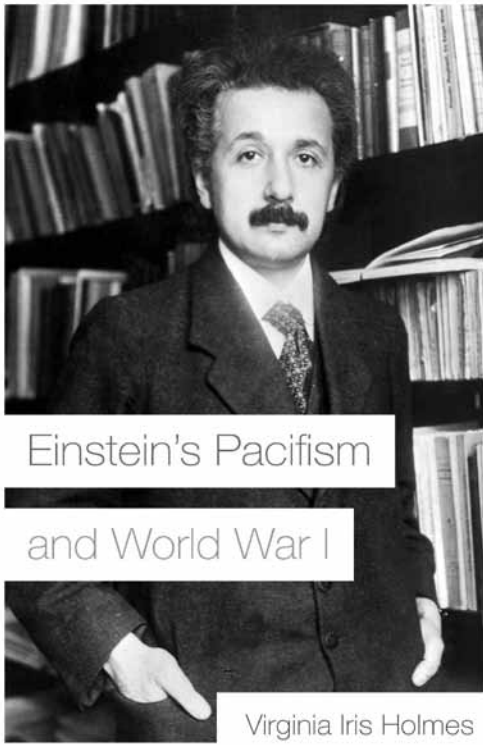
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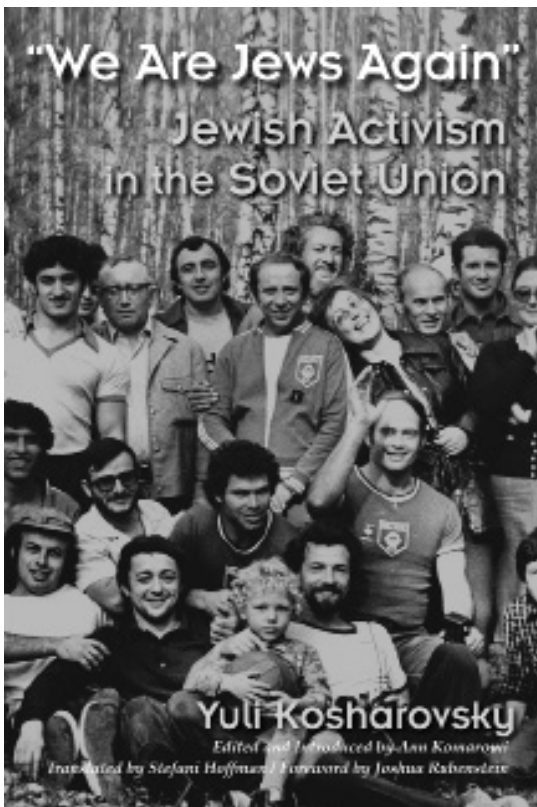
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“JEWS AT THE MARGINS”

The Redemptive Power of Sexual Anarchy

Cengiz Sisman



Center panel from Hieronymus Bosch. *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, c. 1480–1505. Oil on panel, 87 x 77 in. Madrid, Prado. Google Earth via Wikimedia Commons.

Two or more couples attend the ceremony; the ladies in their best garments and jewelry serve a meal of mutton to the diners. After dinner, the candles are extinguished, and the husbands exchange wives. It is believed that children born of such unions are regarded as saintly.

This is rumored to be a scene that took place in one of the most transgressive Sabbatian practices, better known as “Lamb Festival.” The Sabbatians are the followers of the self-declared Jewish messiah, Sabbatai Zvi (1626–1676), who initiated one of the most remarkable messianic movements in world history. After Sabbatai Zvi’s infamous conversion to Islam under Ottoman duress in 1666, some of his followers created a crypto-messianic sect that came to be known as the Dönmes. The sect, overtly Islamic and covertly messianic Jewish, sustained its enigmatic identity in the Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey and still exists today. The Sabbatian movement impacted Judaism via its “heretical” theology; influenced Islam via the Dönme Kabbalah; and had an impact on Christianity via Frankist radicalism in eastern Europe. By the eighteenth century,

Dönmes were divided into three subgroups, Yakubi, Karakaş, and Kapancı, each of which followed a unique historical and theological trajectory. In the meantime, they disagreed practically on anything. For example, the Kapancı’s “Lamb Festival” was called the *Bahar Bayramı* (Spring Festival) among the Yakubi and *Dört Gönül Bayramı* (Festival of Four Souls) among the Karakaş.

Religious communities often use calendars and festivals to reenact the significant events in their history, to renew their cosmic time, and to perpetuate their existence. Calendars and festivals serve as mirrors of experience. The Sabbatian calendar celebrates both Jewish and Islamic holidays—often in a subversive manner—in addition to its own holidays. The Lamb Festival was perhaps the most antinomian (and, by communal standards, antisocial) Dönme festival, so much so that only the radical members dared to observe it.

The most basic description of the festival, based on several historical and contemporary accounts, is as follows: on the night of 22 Adar (sometime in mid-March) the couples gather and perform a series of rituals in a ceremonial

manner. The most important element of the meal at the dinner table is the seasonal lamb. Before that day, believers were supposed to refrain from eating mutton. The dinner is accompanied by songs, hymns, prayers, and drinks. At the end of the night, according to the most widely circulated rumors, the couples extinguish the lights and randomly swap partners. Babies who were conceived on that night were believed to be holy and would-be messiahs. Yitzhak Ben Zvi, an Israeli politician and historian who visited the Dönme communities several times in the first half of the twentieth century, noted: “The candles are put out in the course of the dinner which is attended by orgies and the ceremony of the exchange of wives.”

There are several other written and oral Jewish and Ottoman accounts that claimed the existence of this transgressive practice. For example, a pamphlet circulated by the Istanbul Rabbinate in 1714 makes the same allegation. The Italian rabbi Joseph Ergas refers to it as early as in 1715. These sources suggest that most rabbis refused to work with the Dönmes in later centuries, maintaining that they were likely to be bastards (*mamzerim*).

Therefore, it was forbidden for them to belong to the congregation and marrying them or their children was out of the question. According to a 1914 circular, the Ottoman chief rabbi still held this traditional Jewish attitude toward the Dönmes, accusing them of “immorality, sexual perversity, infidelity, and blasphemy.” Echoing this rabbinical anathema, the historian Joseph Nehama (d. 1971) repeats that the Dönmes lived in sexual anarchy and swapped wives. In the 1870s, an Ottoman bureaucrat, Ahmed Safi, related that a young man of Salonica once happened to see about fifteen people having sex and drinking in one of the Dönme houses. In 1925, a Karakaş woman claimed that she was forced to participate in one of those parties. Another young Kapanıcı man related that the practice continued in the nineteenth century, exclusively among married couples. In the same year, another apologetic Karakaş man, Rüştü, corroborated that the most important and the most blessed of those holidays in the eyes of the Dönmes was the Lamb Festival. In later years, claims that widows were providing sexual training to bachelors and other allegations circulated.

To be sure, the Dönmes were not the originators of this particular antinomian practice. Although its historical origin is unclear, similar rumors and allegations of libertinism have been leveled against closed, esoteric, and messianic communities—including some of the Anatolian Alawites, Eastern Armenians, and Oriental Jews—since antiquity. Even Evliya Çelebi, a seventeenth-century Ottoman intellectual, mentions the existence of similar rumors in eastern Anatolia.

The Sabbatian theology was conducive to antinomian sexual tendencies from the beginning. A certain sexual wantonness entered the movement with the marriage of Sabbatai to “Sarah the harlot,” a Polish-Jewish orphan who dreamed of marrying the messiah, though engaging in forbidden acts had been part of Sabbatian theology from the beginning, based on the talmudic teaching that “the Messianic Age will come when all men are righteous or all men are sinners.” While Sabbatai was in Izmir, he demanded that his followers bring him their virgin daughters but he sent them back a few days later without having touched them. In Istanbul, one of his believers accused him of having committed adultery with his fiancée and impregnating her. The Sabbatian prophet Abraham Cardozo accused Yakub Çelebi, the founder of the Yakubi sect, of sleeping with

his followers’ wives. Even more scandalous sexual allegations were leveled against Osman Baba, the founder of the Karakaş sect.

Like the Dönmes, the Frankists, that is, the Polish Sabbatians, were also the subject of wild rumors about their antinomian behaviors, particularly their ritual transgression of sexual prohibitions. They committed adultery, engaged in wife swapping, studied banned Sabbatian books, and professed the faith of Sabbatai. The diary of the sect’s founder, Jacob Frank, details scenes such as the following: “The Lord set up a guard in the courtyard made up of our people, so that no one might dare even to look through the window, and he himself went in with the Brothers and Sisters, undressed nude and also Her Highness, and ordered all those gathered [to do so]. . . . after that, the sexual relations took place thereafter according to his ordination.”

Such “strange acts” were justified by the postmessianic Dönme Kabbalah, which professed that the messiah had already come and abolished the rulings of the Torah of *Beri’ah* (this world) and initiated the Torah of the *’Azilut* (world-to-come) in its place. In order to penetrate into the *’Azilut* world fully, a believer was supposed to transgress the rulings belonging to this world. To be sure, one of the Sabbatian commandments deals with the prohibition of fornication, but it is formulated in an ambiguous fashion, given that the sexual prohibitions belonged to the world of *Beri’ah*. Gershom Scholem speculates that some of the Dönmes were of the opinion that as long as incest taboos are in force here on earth “it is impossible to perform the unifications above.” In the mystical suspension of the prohibition on incest, man will become “like unto his Creator in the mystery of the Tree of Life.” With this, as Scholem would call it, “redemption through sin” would be realized.

Sexual transgressions paradoxically signify rebirth and purification in mystical traditions. In the case of the Dönmes, through singing, drinking, and eating the “holy flesh of lamb,” which was identified with Sabbatai, the believer became part of the holy community. This is akin to the Eucharist, when the believer partakes of the consecrated bread and wine and is thus united with the body of Christ. But the sexual union would be the closest and highest form of identification with the holy of the holiest.

There is a necessary link between eroticism and mysticism; both of them aspire to realize the ultimate union. In Jewish, Christian, and Islamic mysticism,

sexual experience and sexual images play an integral role in the mystical journey to God. That’s why mystical language uses erotic imagery abundantly in trying to describe the indescribable. One of the most inspirational Muslim mystics, Ibn Arabi (1165–240), for example, likened the moment of orgasm to the *Unio Mystica* experience. So, it would come as no surprise Sabbatai and Sabbatians used sexual imageries such as “marrying Torah,” and “being the bride of the Shekhinah” in their discourses. Fittingly, the “Song of Songs” and “Meliselda” were Sabbatai’s favorite romances.

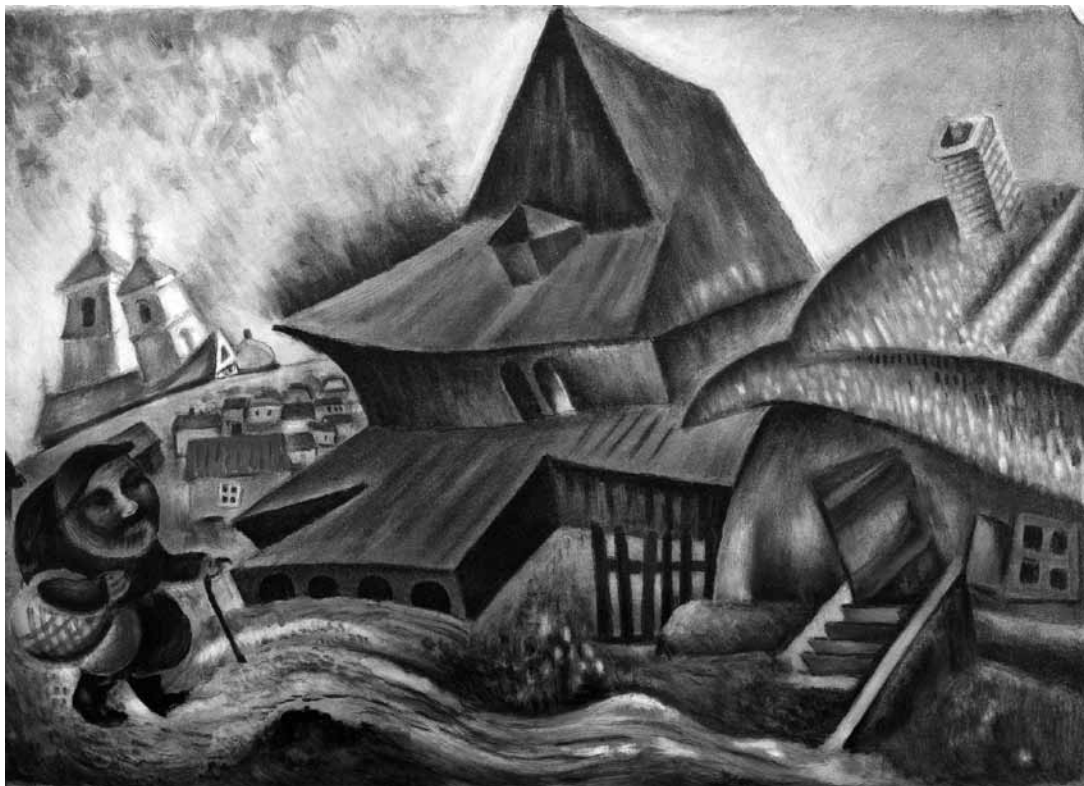
We are not sure whether all the Sabbatians put those transgressive ideas in practice, or whether they simply entertained the idea in a speculative manner. In the earlier times, the rite was practiced on the evening of the traditional commemoration of Sabbatai’s birthday in the spring, but it is not clear whether it was associated with sexuality. The early Dönme songs and hymns contain implicit and explicit references to the festival, such as symbols of “eating,” “the table,” “the opening of the rose,” “providing,” and “lending.”

One of the infamous Dönme leaders, Dervish Efendi of the eighteenth century, institutionalized this practice in full. In his mystical commentaries, he defended the abrogation of the sexual prohibitions contained in the “Torah of *Beri’ah*.” Basing his interpretations of obscure passages in the Zohar, he introduced a sort of “collective marriage,” wherein the women of the sect were married to all the men of the sect. He was even rumored to practice sexual hospitality, a practice that made its way to the Frankist circle. In Dervish Efendi’s homilies, formulae such as “Freedom is the secret of the spiritual Torah,” and “Soldiers are released from the Commandments” clearly refer to these antinomian practices. To some of the Dönmes, this lawless and nihilist attitude toward sexuality granted them the most liberating and redemptive experience on the way to the messianic age.

Cengiz Sisman received his PhD from Harvard University, specializing in Ottoman religious history, focusing on the Sabbatian movement. He is the author of The Burden of Silence: Sabbatai Sevi and the Evolution of the Ottoman-Turkish Dönmes (Oxford University Press, 2015). Currently he is teaching at the University of Houston–Clear Lake.

Shtetls, Taverns, and Baptism

Ellie R. Schainker



Issachar ber Ryback. *My Village*, 1917. Lithograph on paper. Courtesy of Minotaure Gallery Tel Aviv.

As a narrative device in Hebrew, Yiddish, and other vernacular literatures, the tavern has served as a metonym for the rural Jewish encounter with the local Christian population—it is economically generated and culturally conflicted, but socially facilitates quotidian exchanges between Jew and non-Jew. Hasidic rebbes may have feared interfaith intimacy in the remote, unsupervised villages of eastern Europe, but historians and Jewish and Russian contemporaries more often mapped the phenomenon of modern Jewish conversion onto the city, where institutions of higher education, socioeconomic mobility, and a culture of leisure and consumerism facilitated interfaith mixing and sociocultural integration. Moreover, unlike the remote but family-oriented village, the city was thought to offer choice and anonymity, freeing individual Jews from the controlling gaze of organized Jewish communities. In addition to its urban narrative of modern Jewish conversion, imperial Russian history has tended to focus on the army and university as



E. Iakovlev. *Zhidovskaia karchma [Jewish Tavern]*, 1868. The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Print Collection, New York Public Library. New York Public Library Digital Collections.

the twin centers of radical Jewish assimilation, serving as bookends to the reform period and its failed project of Jewish integration. Yet, the urban and impersonal institutional backdrop of modern conversion does not tell the full story of conversions from Judaism. As seen in the historical-cultural space

of the tavern, conversions were a product of face-to-face encounters rather than an impersonal, instrumental border crossing. Moreover, by locating conversions from Judaism in the villages and small towns of the Pale of Settlement, we get a picture of voluntary conversions undertaken in the thick of Jewish life, laying bare the myths of Jewish separatism and the social death of the convert following baptism. Commercial coexistence undergirded social interactions between Jews and their neighbors, and it is these interactions, usually “within heavily prescribed roles,” that frame the cultural and confessional border crossings analyzed here.

Archival and published stories about female converts and taverns in the late imperial period juxtaposed with conversion stories from the pre-reform period suggest that there were many continuities in the social threads of conversion from the early nineteenth century to the turn of the twentieth century, wherein individual conversions were facilitated by social relationships and cultural fluencies forged

before baptism. In this way, the tavern complements such urban meeting grounds as the eighteenth-century salon or twentieth-century coffee house, suggesting that Jewish-Christian sociocultural encounters in the modern age did not only occur in the cosmopolitan centers of Europe.

In July 1871, an eighteen-year-old Jewess, Malka Mendeliovna Lin, with a baby son in tow, was asked to give a deposition before the Grodno police as to why and how she came to the provincial city of Grodno to convert to Russian Orthodoxy. She explained that she had lived with her parents, who were tavern keepers in the town of Bel'sk (Grodno Province), and in 1870 she decided to convert after a soldier in the 102nd Viatka Infantry Regiment who had impregnated her promised to marry her if she converted. Fearful that her parents would discover her pregnancy, she received assistance from the infantry unit to go to Grodno, where she gave birth to a son. As a single mother wary of her family's wrath, Lin asked the unit to petition a local convent in Grodno to give her shelter and prepare her for baptism. Before the convent was able to complete a background check on Lin, she became ill and received an emergency baptism in the care of the army. Lin's shot-gun baptism was approved by the Lithuanian Orthodox Consistory, which then allowed the Grodno provincial administration to follow the usual protocol governing Jewish conversions: a one-time monetary handout (twenty-five rubles in this case), deregistration from the neophyte's Jewish community, and a nine-month window of time in which to choose a new legal social status (*rod zhizni*), namely, a new tax-paying community (*obshchestvo*) and estate (*soslovie*).


The archival evidence of Malka Lin's conversion illustrates how growing up in a tavern with frequent access to, and intimate encounters with, Christians educated Jews about Christianity and facilitated sociability with non-Jews. Although Malka Lin does not explicitly say that she met her lover at the tavern, one can guess that the tavern was the meeting ground for Lin and Private Erokhin. Russian soldiers from the interior stationed in the Pale were often the conduits of informal, unscripted Russian Orthodox proselytizing. Though ethnic Russians were present in the western borderlands, and the Russification campaigns of the 1860s following the Polish insurrection attempted to assert Russian Orthodox hegemony, the lands in the northwest of the empire were historically part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and continued to be

heterogeneously ethnoconfessional—Polish, Belorussian, Ukrainian, Catholic, Uniate, Lutheran. The tavern was not just a space of interaction between people of different religions, but also a space where Russians from the empire's interior could meet and interact with the local population. This is conveyed in the memoirs of Russian writer F. V. Bulgarin (1846–1847), where he recounts his journey in the Pale of Jewish Settlement with a Russian captain who came to a Jewish inn near Kovno and fell in love with the tavern keeper's beautiful young wife, Rivka. The Jewess ended up converting to marry the Russian captain.

In thinking about the tavern and the provincial spaces where Lin and other Jews converted, Bel'sk was by no means a remote village or place with a small Jewish population. Unlike Hirsz Abramowicz and Hasidic rebbes, who mapped interfaith intimacies onto village spaces lacking a Jewish communal infrastructure (such as a synagogue and minyan), the women profiled here crossed confessional boundaries in provincial towns

that had Jewish communal institutions and a significant Jewish population. Although Jews made up only 12 percent of the population of the Pale of Jewish Settlement, they often made up from a third to a half of the inhabitants of its small towns. While acknowledging the nuances of interfaith relations in remote, small village settings, close confessional contacts buoyed conversions in small town settings as well. Although contemporary Jews like Hasidic rebbes and even modern Jewish writers and imperial officials, as we will see, were intent on demarcating Jewish and Christian space along town and village lines, the reality was that physical and cultural boundaries were fluid.


Ellie R. Schainker is the Arthur Blank Family Foundation Assistant Professor of History and Jewish Studies at Emory University, where she specializes in east European Jewish history. The essay published here is an excerpt from her first book, Confessions of the Shtetl: Converts from Judaism in Imperial Russia, 1817–1906 (Stanford University Press, 2016).



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An Ancient Jewess Invoking Goddesses: Transgression or Pious Adaptation?

Mika Ahuvia

Extant sources enable us to imagine the ideals and attitudes of a relatively small group of ancient Jewish men. Rabbinic literature paints vivid pictures of sages engaged in all manner of activities and offer vignettes of others beyond rabbinic circles as well. By contrast, the world of Jewish women remains opaque. Rabbinic wives and exceptional women like Beruria—a second-century woman admired for her wisdom—may leave traces in the Talmud, but otherwise we generally have only their names in inscriptions, and little more to tell us about their outlooks on life. So-called Jewish magical sources might contribute another glimpse. Examining a magical incantation written in Talmudic Aramaic, featuring a female subject, naming Babylonian goddesses and the Lord of Hosts, offers us an opportunity to rethink our preconceptions about ancient Jews and Jewesses.

This piece is a thought experiment, showing how one incantation could make sense from a “Jewess” perspective. Incantation texts that are written in the first-person feminine singular are rare and, of course, authorship and identity in ancient texts cannot be established for certain. Other scholars in the field of ancient magic might insist it is far more likely that a male ritual practitioner wrote this incantation for an illiterate and pagan female client. Still, since we will never know the context in which this was written, a second look may prove productive and help us acknowledge the distance between the Judaism of today and the Judaism of the ancient world, which had practices we might reject as transgressive, practitioners we might deem heretical, and a religious vocabulary that borders on the foreign.

Though rabbinic literature serves as the major source for the study of ancient Judaism, most Jews were not part of the rabbinic movement (as the rabbis themselves lament). In late antiquity Jews lived throughout the Mediterranean world and beyond, speaking local languages even as they maintained some distinctive dietary, bodily, and temporal practices. Ancient Jews might have prayed at home or at the synagogue using some Hebrew, but they also



Incantation bowl, c. 6th–8th century CE, Iraq. Wheel-thrown pottery. 6 ¼ x 2 in. ©Trustees of the British Museum. See Christa Müller-Kessler and Theodore Kwasman. “A Unique Talmudic Aramaic Incantation Bowl.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 120, no. 2 (2000):159-165; and Matthew Morgenstern. “Notes on a Recently Published Aramaic Magic Bowl.” *Aramaic Studies* 2 (2004): 207–222.

went to the marketplace where they spoke other languages, lived in neighborhoods alongside polytheists, and sometimes even shared a courtyard with them. How Jews prayed reflects this shared milieu as well: Jews prayed in Aramaic and unselfconsciously used Greek titles for God like *kyrios*, commonly used by Christians in their liturgy too.

The term “magic” is fraught and many scholars find it more distracting than productive, preferring the more neutral term “ritual practice.” The rabbis in the Talmud described their own powerful incantations, conjurations, and contests with witches and other sorcerers, but they would never describe their deeds as magic—magic was only what *other people* did, that is, pagans or women. There is ample evidence from Palestine, Babylonia, and the Cairo Genizah that shows rabbis and ordinary Jews engaged in magical practices, such as commissioning and composing amulets and incantational texts. In contrast to the rabbinic stereotypes about women and magic, Michael Morony’s surveys of surviving texts show that 59 percent of surviving extant Jewish ritual objects were commissioned by men and only

41 percent by women. As Rebecca Lesses has persuasively argued, ancient Jewish men and women engaged in such ritual practices.

In this incantation, the client is attempting to defend herself from other sorcerers, their demons, and their spells, and she relies on a combination of sources of power to help her. In the late antique world, there was a spectrum of authority figures to whom ancient Jews could appeal when they prayed or engaged in ritual practices: they could address God directly, pray through the *hazzan* (prayer leader), approach rabbis, solicit a ritual practitioner, or they could take on an intermediary role themselves as ritual practitioners. Ancient Jewish ritual practitioners were themselves diverse in their approaches to the divine. Some Jewish practitioners, whom we might say were very pious, treated incantations like public prayers and avoided using the sacred name of God in their amulets altogether. Many practitioners described themselves as acting under the auspices of the heavens or in the name of God and the angels. Some used the sacred and taboo name of God (the tetragrammaton) to prevail over demons. Still others invoked angels as witnesses. A few Jewish ritual practitioners, relying on their own authority and power, likened themselves to angels.

The self-characterization of these Jewish practitioners needs to be understood in terms of how pagan ritual practitioners went about their work: polytheistic incantation texts from the Greek Magical Papyri often show the practitioners describing themselves as divinities. To list a few examples: “I am Hermes”; “I am Anubis . . . I am Osiris”; “I am Adam the forefather”; “I am Horus . . .”; or the Coptic invocation: “I am Mary, I am Mariham, I am the mother of the life of the whole world. . . .” These ritual practitioners assume the voice of heroes, forefathers and foremothers, and gods. It seems likely that assuming these voices gave the practitioners confidence or a sense of authority with which to heal, protect, or serve their clients.

One of the distinguishing features of Jewish incantation texts is that Jewish practitioners only aspire to the status of angels and even then they make sure to affirm God’s singular supremacy. In one

popular formula from the city of Nippur, a practitioner begins an incantation by describing himself as an angelic figure of fire: “Again I come, I, Pabak bar Kufithai, in my own might, on my person polished armor of iron, my head of iron, my figure of pure fire. I am clad with the garment of Hermes . . . and the Word, and my power is in him who created heaven and earth.” This practitioner does not assert that he is an angel, let alone a God, but does assert his power and that he acts under God’s auspices. We have here an example of Jews sharing a linguistic formula with polytheists, but adapting it to Jewish sensibilities.

Angels in the biblical and Jewish imagination were gendered masculine (see male visitors that turn out to be angels in Genesis 18–19; seraphim who cover their “legs” in Isaiah 6:1–6; or women who need to be modest because of the angels in 1 Corinthians 11:10). With this principle in mind, to whom could a Jewish female ritual practitioner liken herself if she wished to describe her own authority? Perhaps local goddesses that she saw in the world around her:

I, Gusnazdukht daughter of Ahat, am sitting at my gate, resembling Bablita.

I, Gusnazdukht daughter of Ahat, am sitting in my portico, resembling Borsipita.

We encounter Gusnazdukht sitting at her gate, a liminal space both public and private, and she is describing her confidence by comparing herself to local Babylonian goddesses: Bablita and Borsipita. Notice that she only states that she resembles these goddesses. She does not call on the goddesses to help her or identify with them. The fact that she compares herself to goddesses, rather than angels, may be an example of a woman using the cultural vocabulary available to her to describe herself in feminine, yet also powerful terms. Gusnazdukht looks elsewhere to accomplish what she cannot do with Hebrew liturgical or ritual vocabulary.

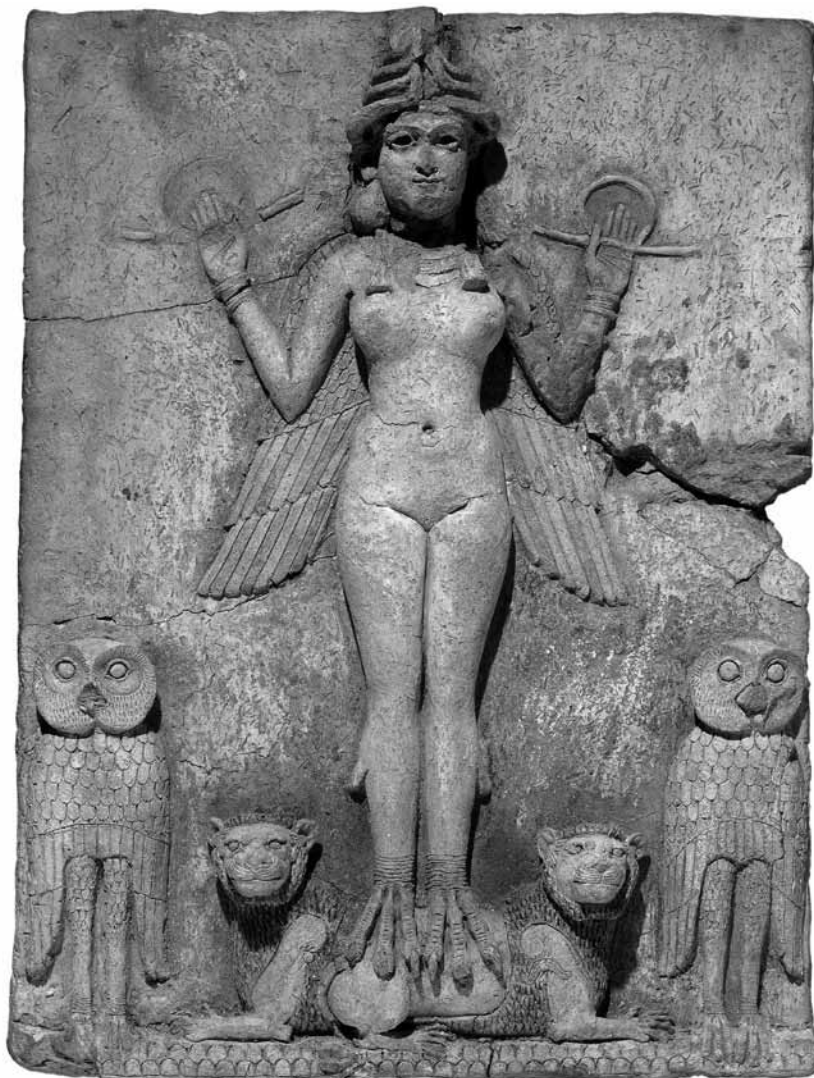
Ioana Latu recently published a study in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* (Latu et al, 2003) showing that simply hanging pictures of successful female leaders in a room significantly increased women’s confidence and improved their performance in challenging tasks. Might divine feminine figures outside the Jewish tradition have inspired women in antiquity in a similar

way, even if they did not worship them? Was there a space for cultural conversation that did not amount to transgressive idolatry? This incantation may depict one woman navigating these considerations within the parameters of ancient ritual practices.

After detailing her struggle and triumph over her adversaries, at the end of the incantation, there is an appeal to a singular god, signing off with the formula “in the name of Tyqws ʾnwh Sabaoth, Amen Amen Selah.” Tyqws is an obscure name: here it’s joined with the Jewish God’s name and the epithet of Hosts. Is Tyqws a cryptic cipher for *ʾAdonai*? Or is it an entirely different being, the ruler of all demons? Is this an appeal to the God of all demons and heavenly hosts—an example of cultural and religious hybridity? An acknowledgement that God rules over good and evil beings (Isaiah 45:7)?

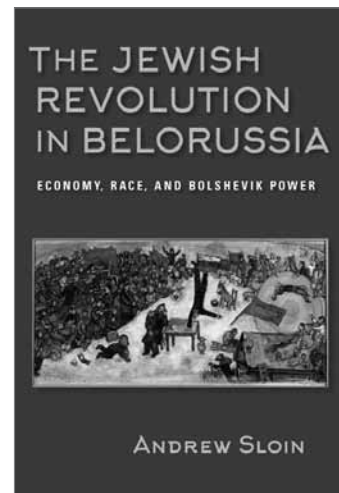
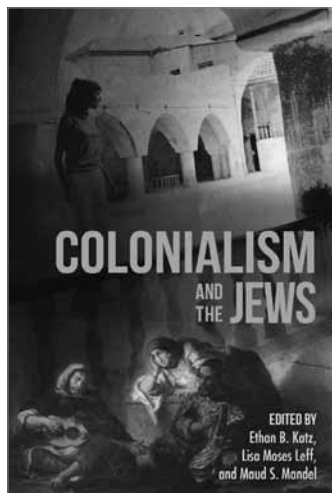
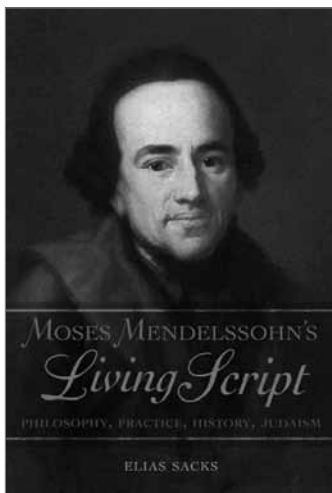
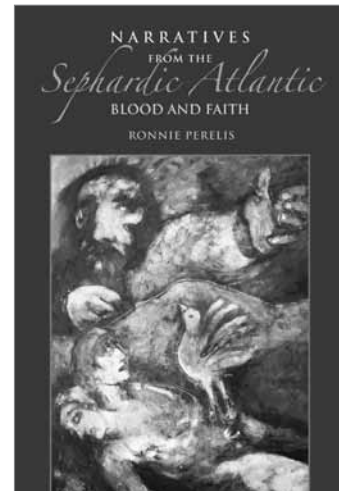
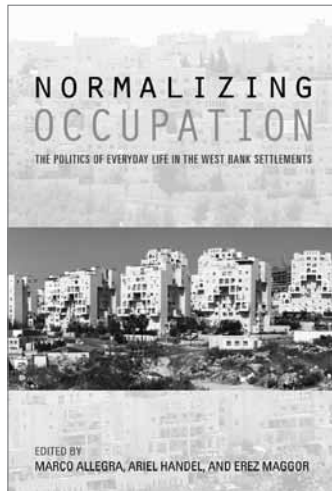
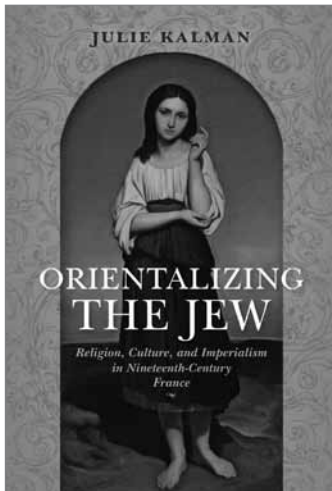
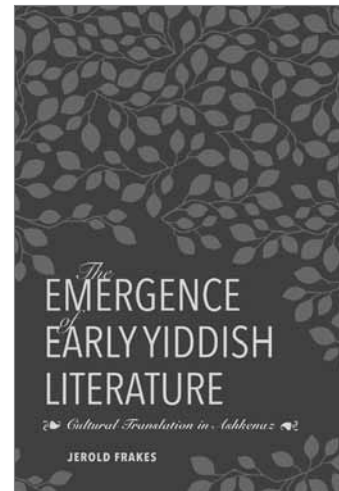
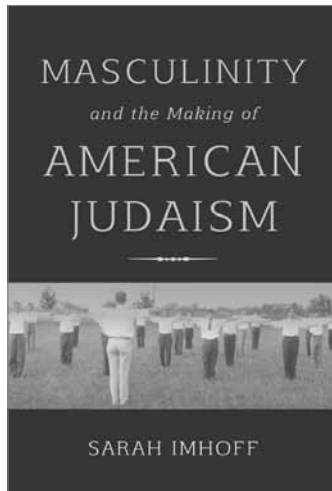
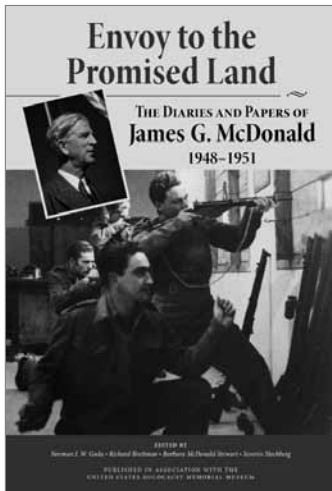
The easy solution would be to exclude this incantation from examination from a Jewish perspective, to write it off as written by a male Jewish ritual specialist for a non-Jewish client. This might be termed cautious, but it is not necessarily objective and leaves the text opaque. Good scholarship opens up understanding; it does not close it off. In this case, the amulet presents an identity that is not easy to reconcile with our preconceptions, but perhaps that is what makes it so important for the understanding of Jewish identity in antiquity.

Mika Ahuvia is assistant professor of Classical Judaism in the Jackson School of International Studies at the University of Washington. She received her PhD in religion from Princeton University in 2014. Her dissertation, “Israel among the Angels,” analyzed conceptions of angels in Jewish texts from the fourth to eighth century CE.



Burney Relief “The Queen of the Night,” c. 19th–18th century BCE, Babylonia. Fired clay, 19 ½ x 14 ½ x 2 in. ©Trustees of the British Museum.

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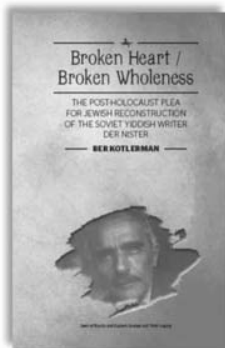
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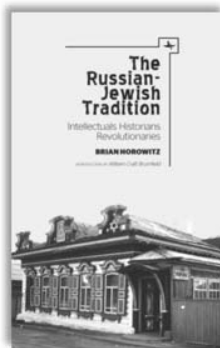
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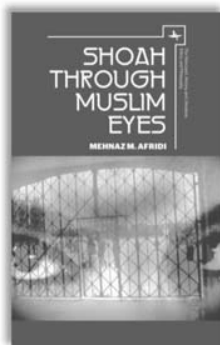
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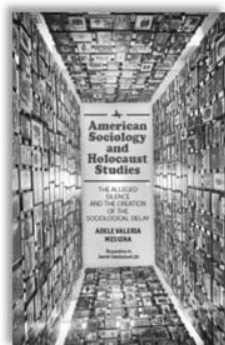
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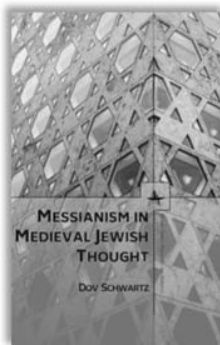
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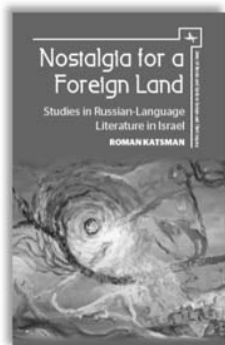
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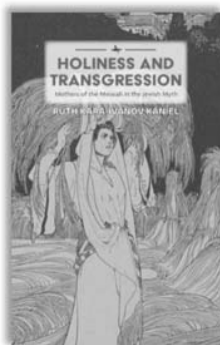
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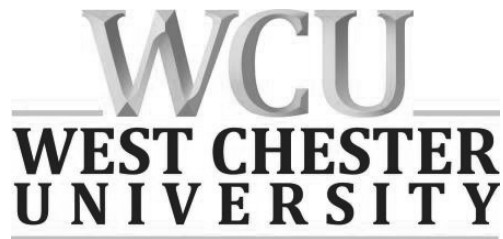
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“NOT A PROBLEM?”

Transgressions, Archie Rand, and the Bible in Contemporary Art

Samantha Baskind



Figure 1. Archie Rand. *Adam*, 1992. Acrylic and marker on canvas, 18 x 24 in. From the series *Sixty Paintings from the Bible*. Courtesy of the artist.

For some Jews, transgression in art was once considered the mere making of art. The long-standing canard that until the modern era Jews did not make art, and should not make art, was grounded in the assumption that obedience to the biblical proscription against “graven images” denied them this opportunity. Even though the second commandment has little to do with religious belief or practice, but rather a great deal to do with how Jews have imagined Jewish art, to some degree the heritage of this “prohibition” still affected Jewish artists. Maurice Sterne, who in his own day was famous enough to command the first one-person exhibition by an American artist at the Museum of Modern Art (1933), recalled being chastised for his love of art: “Religious Jews took very seriously the Biblical injunction against ‘graven images,’ and I was punished badly one day by the rabbi of my school for drawing his picture

on the ground with a stick. He said that I had broken the Second Commandment.” An artist from the next generation, David Aronson, also experienced the lingering effects of the historical and cultural freight attached to the second commandment. Aronson believed he was sinning when making art: “Religion was the main purpose for survival and for whom figurative art was denied by Scriptural precept. . . . I committed the combined profanations [*sic*] of refusing confirmation and choosing as my life’s work that which is prohibited in the second commandment—the making of graven images.”

Transgressions by geographically diverse contemporary Jewish artists go far beyond an imagined broken commandment. Jewish artists paint canvases where biblical figures talk about fucking within comic book speech balloons (Archie Rand, 1992) and reconfigure film footage of Hitler to

make it appear as if he is apologizing, in Hebrew, for the Final Solution (Boaz Arad, 2000). In other words, the sacred text and the sacred memory—the Bible and the Holocaust—are startlingly desacralized.

Even before the sacred became desacralized, the simple presence of Jewishness in art made some viewers uncomfortable. That is, for some it felt unseemly, transgressively indecorous, to have Jewish subject matter appear in art. In a 1955 review in *Commentary* magazine, for instance, critic Hilton Kramer denigrated Hyman Bloom’s expressionist canvases of rabbis and other Jewish subjects: “To the ‘foreign’ eye, which brings no associations to it, it must be as absorbing as a kosher dinner—a matter of taste. But for the observer who has associations with this imagery from childhood onwards, Bloom’s Jewish paintings stimulate the same surprise and dismay

one feels at finding *gefилte* fish at a cocktail party. It's a bit too stylish to be palatable."

Curator Norman Kleeblatt of New York's Jewish Museum experienced similar discomfort when confronted by especially strong Jewish material, but he dealt with that reaction more productively. Kleeblatt visited Archie Rand's studio in 1989, where he saw the artist's *Fifty-Four Chapter Paintings*. This series of like-numbered canvases depicts the weekly chapters of the Torah sometimes with literal iconography and at other times symbolically or abstractly, all labeled in Hebrew. Reacting with "embarrassment," to use Kleeblatt's words, at the paintings' "excessive 'Jewishness,'" the curator soon resolved to explore the upsurge in Jewish material in several artists' work. Rand's *Fifty-Four Chapter Paintings* inspired Kleeblatt's groundbreaking exhibition, *Too Jewish?: Challenging Traditional Identities* (1996).

Rand's vast body of work, transgressive in style and subject, is inspired by the artist's belief that he must augment Jewish pictorial expression, which brings us full circle to the misunderstood prohibition against graven images: "I realized that one of the rights and obligations of any culture is to manifest a visual exponent of that culture. Judaism had been forced externally and internally to ignore that impulse." Let us now look at some paintings from Rand's breakthrough series, *Sixty Paintings from the Bible* (1992), his earliest on a Jewish theme in a comic book style and largest series to that moment, to better understand his relentlessly consistent interest in creating avant-garde art with Jewish subject matter.

Each loosely painted canvas in *Sixty Paintings from the Bible* portrays a familiar moment from the Hebrew Bible or the Apocrypha, most rendered expressionistically and in comic book Technicolor. Speech bubbles, encapsulating text written in marker, explicate each story. Within the various-sized balloons Rand inserts everyday vernacular, shaped by closely consulting corresponding biblical passages. Looking at the Standard English translations and then examining the Hebrew, Rand concluded that the English often did not quite accord. Recognizing that the original words were more powerful and dramatic, Rand introduced his loose adaptations of the biblical text. He likens this process to one used by Borscht Belt performers: take an expected conclusion and throw a curve ball. Rand's colloquial interpretations, both stylistically and through the attribution of common language to the



Figure 2. Archie Rand. *Elisha Watches Elijah Depart*, 1992. Acrylic and marker on canvas, 18 x 24 in. From the series *Sixty Paintings from the Bible*. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 3. Archie Rand. *Potiphar's Wife*, 1992. Acrylic and marker on canvas, 18 x 24 in. From the series *Sixty Paintings from the Bible*. Courtesy of the artist.

biblical figures, convey drama and sometimes humor, adding a fresh, accessible, postmodern perspective to foundational stories that have shaped Judaism as well as human civilization. The canvases in the series offer unexpected rereadings designed to make viewers think twice about proverbial tales.

Adam, the first canvas in the series, reveals Adam and Eve's nudity more obviously and wittily than the old masters (fig. 1). Jan van Eyck, for example, had the original humans press fig leaves against their genitals in *The Ghent Altarpiece* (1430–1432). The fig leaf coverings indicate the couple's newfound shame—and minimize the embarrassment of fifteenth-century churchgoers. Masaccio painted the figures in *Adam and Eve Fleeing the Garden of Eden* in the Brancacci Chapel's *Expulsion* fresco (1425) nude, but a later artist covered the pair's genitalia (1620). In contrast, Rand cuts right to the chase, demarcating the pair's exposed sex organs with green triangular outlines. Separated from a red-haired, Rubenesque Eve standing beside the Tree of Life at the center of the composition, Adam turns to his mate and shouts, "We're naked!" An exclamation point, large, capitalized lettering, and triple underlining convey his surprise.

Some canvases can be cynical and even a bit snarky about religion. *Elisha Watches Elijah Depart*—one of three paintings in the series devoted to Elijah's protégé—portrays the moment when Elijah passes the baton to his successor (fig. 2). Elijah leaves the world in a chariot that radiates yellow flames, while a seated Elisha, rooted to the earth on the left side of the canvas, is charged

with his formidable task as prophet. The biblical text explains that Elisha asks for the faith that Elijah possesses: "I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me" (2 Kings 2:9). Playing with words, Rand's uncertain Elisha requests, as if he were sitting on a barstool: "Can I have a double portion of your spirit?" A strong drink to calm the nerves may be the best way for Elisha to blindly follow God's directives.

Unafraid to be subversive, especially in the realm of sexuality, Rand makes evident the seamier moments in the Bible. An unnamed woman of Egyptian descent, known only as Potiphar's wife, attempts to seduce Joseph. The biblical text dances around any lascivious aspects, but Rand's canvas puts them front and center (fig. 3). Lounging nude in an elaborate canopied bed with a sheet barely—and provocatively—wrapped around her body, Potiphar's wife grabs the fleeing Joseph's flaming red cape, attempting to pull him back to her. She vulgarly exhorts, in large capital letters, "Fuck me!" as opposed to the mild language of the biblical passage (in its common English translation): "Lie with me!" (Genesis 39:12). Rand paints the interior of Potiphar's wife's bedroom, a place of sexuality and lust, in sensuous colors, whereas the outer, safer, public spaces of the palace appear only in gray.

Viewers who cringe when viewing these paintings are missing the point. Crucially, Rand's series is not didactic religious art akin to that made by Old Masters such as Raphael and Caravaggio, but a postmodern artistic conception that tries to universalize some of the Bible's archetypal stories, delineating

basic human emotions and issues, such as power, faith, humility, sexuality, and family dynamics. Nor does Rand aim to be disrespectful or wantonly shock; he feels humor offers viewers an "in" to the Bible by "taking the sacrosanct-ness out of the stories without being necessarily irreligious. There's nothing irreligious about these pictures. It's exactly what's going on, but they're painted in such a way that they become available. The notion of making something so sacred available is, still to this day, a very touchy subject." Moreover, *Sixty Paintings from the Bible* stands as an experiment in style, color, and word as much as a contribution to "Jewish art."

Rand knew that by working on biblical subjects in the late twentieth century, even though the paintings are not meant to be theological in nature, he would probably be excluded from the modernist discourse (and he was). Namely, the canvases are considered transgressive by the mainstream art establishment because the subject matter is understood as passé. Nonetheless, Rand's ambitious, game-changing *Sixty Paintings from the Bible* was a risk with consequences he was willing to take, a risk which to this day resonates in his art.

Samantha Baskind, professor of Art History at Cleveland State University, is the author of five books, including The Afterlife of the Warsaw Ghetto in American Art and Culture (forthcoming Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018). She is also series editor of Dimyonot: Jews and the Cultural Imagination (Pennsylvania State University Press).



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“A Language beyond This”: Transgression and the Palestinian Hebrew Writer

Lital Levy

Within the family of malfeasance and wrongdoing, transgression stands apart. Where sin and iniquity are expressions of moral failure, transgression is the act of crossing a line. As an infringement of laws or social norms, it suggests a spatialized conception of morality, one located outside the self. To transgress, in short, is to overstep boundaries, similar to “trespass,” which in archaic English also had a theological connotation. And for this reason, transgression has a second life within the world of culture. Like iconoclasm, transgression is the source of great art, most of which begins with the testing—if not the shattering—of convention and certitude.

In my own work I’ve spent a good deal of time thinking about transgression in relation to a certain politics: the language politics of Hebrew and Arabic. In Israel/Palestine, the interweaving of the theological, the legal, and the spatial shapes every dimension of life, from the separation wall, checkpoints, and bypass roads, to separate school systems for Arabs and Jews and largely segregated residential patterns. In Hebrew, *‘averah* (transgression or trespass) is a near homonym of *‘avirah* (passing or crossing); both derive from the root ‘-v-r, which is also the source of *‘uri* (Hebrew), those people from “beyond” the Euphrates River. In 1979, a young Palestinian Israeli writer, Anton Shammas, later the internationally renowned author of *Arabesques*, titled his second poetry collection *Shetah hefker*, “No-man’s-land.” The volume closes pensively: “I do not know / a language beyond this / and a language beyond this. / And I hallucinate in the no-man’s-land.” From his vantage point in the middle of this no-man’s-land, the hallucinating poet looks out at one language then the other, seeking a “language beyond this” (*safah me-ever mi-zeh*): a language beyond the virulent politics of separation. In the early 1980s, not long after the publication of his poem, Shammas had said of his Hebrew literary activity, “This whole thing is a kind of cultural trespassing, and the day may come when I will be punished for it.”

I took this as the organizing metaphor for my 2014 book *Poetic Trespass*, which explored the relationship between Hebrew and Arabic



Old Jerusalem, Muslim Quarter, Al-Wad street sign. January 9, 2013. Photo by Wikipedia user Yael Y. via Wikimedia Commons.

in the cultural life of Israel/Palestine. There, I devoted a full chapter to the Hebrew poetry of Palestinians in Israel. Given the profound associations of Hebrew with Judaism as well as the storied role of Hebrew in political Zionism, it is hard to see how, for a Palestinian Arab, writing in Hebrew could be anything other than a politically fraught and psychologically double-edged act. Previously, literary critics had credited Palestinian writing in Hebrew with divesting the language of its Jewishness and recoding it as Israeli rather than Jewish. I didn’t find this claim supported, however, by the Hebrew-language poetry of Palestinian writers, which draws deeply from the allusive wellspring of Jewish liturgy and heritage. My own reading of their verse probed how Palestinian poets contend directly with the Jewishness of Hebrew, appropriating it as a mode of self-expression and adapting it, often with considerable irony, to give voice to their own unique predicament.

Is their claim to Hebrew transgressive? From Jewish perspectives, the answer splits two ways. For ethnocentric nationalists who objectify Hebrew as the exclusive cultural property of Jews and the privileged signifier of Jewishness, the answer is yes; for liberals who view language as a labile and inherently porous medium that cannot

be owned, the answer is an obvious no. But from a Palestinian perspective, is the choice of Hebrew as the medium of self-expression a defiant intrusion onto Jewish territory and a disruption of Zionist norms, or a betrayal of Palestinian selfhood?

Perhaps unsurprisingly, their Hebrew verse is suffused with varieties of borders and with a persistent sense of transgression. Borders signify the split self, while transgression plays the chords of agonizing self-scrutiny, often sounded in a Jewish key. In a 1986 poem titled “Al ḥet” (For the sin), Na’im ‘Araidi writes, “For the sin I committed against myself and my beloved / on the way to Jerusalem approaching Bethel / From the desert I took the fullness of my love / until Abraham laughed and Ishmael cried.” The poem is modeled on the long *Vidui* (confession of sins) in the Yom Kippur liturgy, when worshipers collectively seek forgiveness of God; echoing this liturgy, subsequent stanzas of ‘Araidi’s poem repeat the refrain *‘al ḥet she-ḥatati*, “for the sin I committed.” In Anton Shammas’s 1974 poem “I Feel the Crease,” the speaker describes dropping tefillin from a roof while choking, of “making Kiddush / over the white city,” and then compares the split in his soul to a crease running through Jesus’s body in a worn-out print of the Last Supper.

Yet for all the fascination with transgression that I poured into the pages of my book, it turns out that such soulful ruminations on writing in Hebrew are virtually absent from the work of the Palestinian novelist, journalist, and screenwriter Sayed Kashua. If in *Arabesques* (1986), Shammas had referred to Hebrew as the “language of Grace,” in Kashua’s 2016 *Native*, a selection of his humorous vignettes for *Haaretz*, Hebrew is the language of bureaucratic dysfunction, of his children’s swimming lessons, of the walk-in clinic in Jerusalem. In *Native*, transgression is mostly about staying too late at the bar and having a bit too much to drink. Arabic, by contrast, is the family language that, heartbreakingly, when voiced in public spurs a little Jewish boy to say “Eww, yuck” to the author’s own small son.

This is not to say that Kashua’s work is devoid of split selves or of self-doubt—to the contrary, he takes these themes and literary devices to new levels. In his 2010 *Guf sheni yehid* [Second Person Singular], for example, transgression is thematized through outright identity theft: a metaphor, perhaps, for self-betrayal. But on many levels

from the thematic to the stylistic, Kashua demystified Palestinian writing in Hebrew, stripping it of its theological baggage. In fact, in *Native*, the only pushback he receives for writing in Hebrew comes during his book tour in the United States, from a Palestinian woman who calls it “the language in which your people are oppressed.”

Reading Kashua has made me circle back on my earlier ideas and wonder if his matter-of-fact approach to Hebrew, which cuts through the mystique surrounding Palestinian Hebrew authorship, is not somehow the more transgressive attitude. Kashua seems to be saying: just own it. Granted, you can’t own the language, but you can own the act of writing in it. *Native*’s title says as much—in Hebrew, it’s *Ben ha-arez*, literally “son of the land” or “native son,” but also an obvious pun on Kashua’s public role as a columnist for *Haaretz*. Yet what many Hebrew speakers might miss is that *ben ha-arez* is in fact a literal translation of the Arabic idiom *ibn al-balad*. This kind of trilingual punning in which languages flow into each other like tributaries with no clear point of origin exemplifies the creative potential of transgression. Will there ever be “a language beyond this” in

Israel/Palestine, a fruitful commingling of the two languages? Hard to say, but in his books Kashua seems to have definitively moved the Palestinian Hebrew writer out of the Hebrew-Arabic no-man’s-land.

Lital Levy is associate professor of comparative literature at Princeton University. She specializes in contact zones of Modern Hebrew and Arabic. Her research encompasses literature and film from Israel/Palestine, the nineteenth- and twentieth-century intellectual history of Arab Jews, the interface of Jewish literature and world literature, and the comparative study of non-Western renaissance and revival movements. Her book, Poetic Trespass: Writing between Hebrew and Arabic in Israel/Palestine (Princeton University Press, 2014), which examines questions of multilingualism, translation, and the cultural politics of language in Israel/Palestine, won the MLA Prize for a first book, the Jordan Schnitzer Book Award, and the Salo Wittmayer Baron Prize. She is currently working on an intellectual history of Arab Jews in the Nahda (modern Arabic renaissance) and the Haskalah, expected in 2018 with Stanford University Press.

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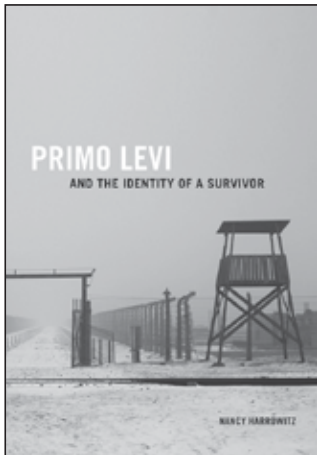
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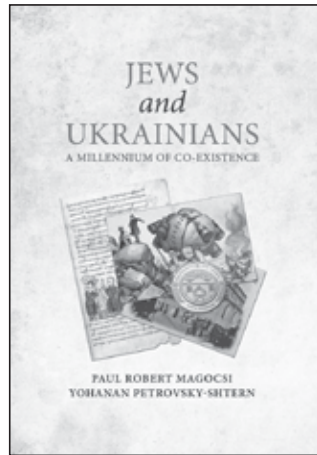
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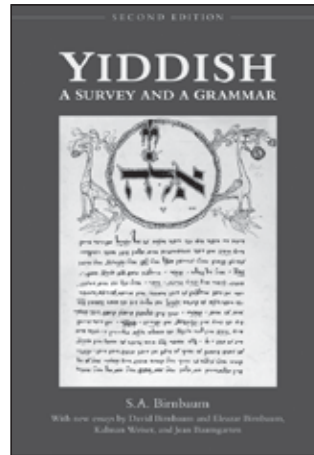




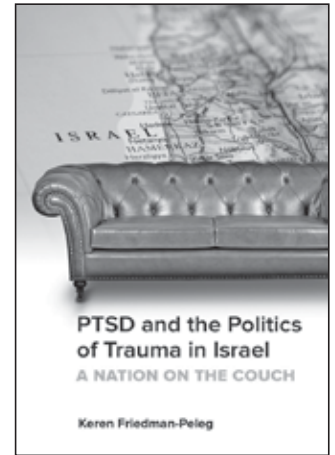
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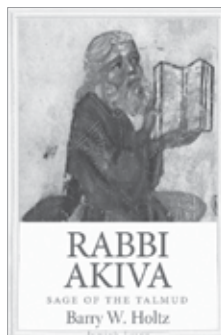
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The Frankel Institute for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Michigan provides residential fellowships for scholars to conduct research around an annual theme. We are currently accepting applications for the 2018-2019 theme, “Sephardic Identities, Medieval and Early Modern.”

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Forum on Pedagogy

Embracing Discomfort

What do your students find to be the most difficult and uncomfortable idea in your introductory-level Jewish Studies classes? And what pedagogical techniques have you found most effective for creating safe spaces that encourage students to explore these ideas?

Mara H. Benjamin

St. Olaf College

At the Lutheran (ELCA)-affiliated liberal arts college where I teach, most of my students were raised in church-going Christian households. My students' primary reference point for Jews is the New Testament; sometimes I am the first Jew they have met. Since the charged place of Judaism in the traditional Christian imaginary often stimulates students' interest in my courses, I try to parlay that curiosity into the study of Jewish culture, religion, and history on their own terms.

In my course on Jewish-Christian encounter, however, I face the task of leading students through an inarguably difficult history while simultaneously interrupting the temptation to see Jews solely as victims of Christian anti-Judaism. Provocative writings by Jews about Christianity aid me in this effort. These texts range from the *Toledot Yeshu* traditions of late antiquity to medieval halakhic rulings that presume Christianity's idolatrous character to Franz Rosenzweig's affirmation that "we [Jews] have crucified Christ and, believe me, would do it again every time, we alone in the whole world." These transgressive texts elicit surprise, even shock, and discomfort. Because I anticipate this reaction, I am careful about how and when I introduce such texts in the course, waiting until we have developed a rapport as a community of learners. But then, with trust firmly established, I use students' discomfort as they encounter Jewish intellectual aggression as a rich resource for learning. I ask students to turn a critical gaze on their own responses in our class discussions. Then we can think together about the unfamiliar (for them) experience of viewing Christianity as Other.

Mara Benjamin is associate professor of Religion at St. Olaf College. She is the author of Rosenzweig's Bible: Reinventing Scripture for Jewish

Modernity (Cambridge University Press, 2009) and is a recipient of a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities for her forthcoming book, The Obligated Self: Maternal Subjectivity and Jewish Thought (Indiana University Press).

Steven Fine

Yeshiva University

Hillel, Akiva, Abbaye, and Rava are not just historical figures at Yeshiva University, but cultural heroes and often intimates. Thanks to our unique dual curriculum, I can confidently refer to biblical, rabbinic, and medieval sources in the original languages, expecting many students to be able to finish my citation. My students care deeply and bring a variety of traditional and modernist frames to our often raucous class discussions.

Students choose my introductory courses knowing that they might be theologically challenged, but that it will be a fun ride. They encounter sources not studied in yeshivot—from recognizably "rabbinic" sources (including midrashim, piyyut, and targum) to Second Temple literature, Classics, New Testament, archaeology—and most of all, new ways to look at sources that they already know. Some students jump at all of this exciting newness, while others are jittery about it. My student-centered teaching is intended to help each person to integrate this new knowledge—often through individualized research projects, public presentations, and review essays of scholarly monographs chosen based on their interests.

Bringing students into the process of research is essential, and I actively share my own work and current thinking. One memorable experience was the day that a minister in California's Central Valley sent me images of an unpublished fifth-century Aramaic tombstone from Zoar (in Jordan, on the Dead Sea) that was preserved in his congregation's museum of biblical archaeology. I set my undergrads to

deciphering this artifact. A lively conversation ensued with Rev. Carl Morgan and with scholars in England and Israel. The church later donated this rather fragile artifact to Yeshiva University Museum, and this memorable exchange made the *New York Times*. On another occasion, I sent a group of general education students to check out "proof" adduced by an Israeli rabbi that the Menorah is hidden at the Vatican, published in advance of Pope Francis's 2014 visit to Israel. This resulted in a spirited search for rare halakhic texts, phone interviews with former Israeli government officials, rabbis, and Vatican officials, a public letter addressed to then President Peres refuting this urban legend, and coverage in the *Wall Street Journal*.

Archaeology, museum visits, and interpretive videos (like David Macaulay's *Roman City* and PBS's *From Jesus to Christ*) expose students to new sources, venues, and approaches. My larger goal is that these students someday confidently explain a museum exhibit or archaeological site to their own families, mull over some talmudic dictum in a different way, or read excitedly of a new discovery—applying learning from my course in their own lives. It's a fun ride for me as well.

Steven Fine, founding editor of AJS Perspectives, is the Dean Pinchos Churgin Professor of Jewish History at Yeshiva University and director of the Yeshiva University Center for Israel Studies. His book, The Menorah: From the Bible to Modern Israel, was recently published by Harvard University Press.

Joshua Garroway

Hebrew Union College

Rabbinical students exploring early Christian literature struggle to appreciate Paul as a Jew. That Jesus and his disciples were apocalyptic Jews who anticipated the imminent redemption of Israel does not appear to bother them, especially once

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they learn that much of Jesus's periodic vitriol against Jews and Jewish institutions more likely reflects the perspective of later Christians than of Jesus himself. But when I tell the students of recent (and in my view, correct) perspectives on Paul, which consider the apostle a Jew even as he inveighs against the Law and his nonbelieving kinsmen, they invariably recoil. Galatians 3 proves especially irritating. There Paul utilizes thoroughly Jewish biblical exegesis—quotation, allusion, analogy, wordplay, etc.—to demonstrate that the death and resurrection of Jesus displaces the Torah and that baptism, not birth, determines true descent from Abraham. The students deem Paul's argument strained and spurious, even as they acknowledge that their own sermons and *divre Torah* often draw on midrashim that are no less contrived. They condemn Paul's demotion of the Torah as a wholesale rejection of Judaism, even as they concede that their intellectual forbears in the Reform movement held a similar view of Jewish Law as historically important but nonetheless outmoded.

I have found role play the best tool for overcoming this initial pushback. Oddly enough, it's a technique Paul himself uses. At times in his letters he deploys the ancient rhetorical artifice called *prosopopoeia*, speech-in-character, by taking on and expressing a perspective that is not his own. I think it is an invaluable way for students to appreciate the struggles and motivations of historical actors, and I use it often when teaching history to rabbinical and undergraduate students. I create scenarios in which students are asked to speak or write as though they are Paul, to assume what he assumes and to think the way he thinks. Sometimes I generate transhistorical conversations, either in class or in written assignments, where "Paul" might discuss antinomian trends in Jewish history with the likes of, say, "Anan ben David," "Sabbatai Zvi," or "Samuel Holdheim." Encouraging students to inhabit the worldview of a historical figure cultivates empathy. It also creates a safe space to explore difficult ideas by allowing students to think and speak transgressively without themselves transgressing.

Joshua Garroway is associate professor of Early Christianity and Second Commonwealth Judaism at the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion in Los Angeles and at the Louchheim School for Judaic Studies at the University of Southern California. He is the author of Paul's

Gentile-Jews: Neither Jew nor Gentile, but Both (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2012).

Verena Kasper-Marienberg *North Carolina State University*

Having primarily taught premodern Jewish history classes in Austria and only recently in the United States, I expected the difficulties of Austrian and American students to be very different due to the presence of Jewish life in the United States versus the lack thereof in Austria. However, the feeling of "foreignness" and "unconnectedness" to both the early modern period and traditional Jewish culture were among the difficulties my students most often expressed in both places.

I encourage all of my students to take their learning outside of the classroom and make the semester a holistic experience by reading firsthand accounts and novels; watching documentaries and movies; listening to Jewish music; visiting Jewish memorial sites, former Jewish neighborhoods, and places of worship; and speaking with friends and family about anything related to Judaism and Jewish history. My Austrian students appreciated this because it gave them an active starting point beyond their academic reading, and they realized their progress as they continually promoted their knowledge outside the classroom. However, for them, this often meant experiencing their direct spatial surroundings or place of origin for the first time as a (formerly) Jewish space and a space of persecution even before the Holocaust, which also caused them to feel uncomfortable. In first writing about and then discussing their experiences in class, their surprise at their own ignorance about these topics helped them articulate their discomfort, coalesce into a group, and advocate for the study of Jewish history.

Obviously, with my American students, I do not have the option of sending them outside the classroom to have immediate experiences of premodern Jewish spaces. "All these places in Europe are so hard for me to imagine. I have never been there," one of my students said this semester. Maps, pictures, and videos can obviously help here, as can early modern travel reports and firsthand accounts such as those of Glikl, Maimon, or Wengeroff. Again and again, students find these accounts stunning and exciting. The most effective method, however, seems to be taking them to see premodern Judaica collections at

libraries or museums. Seeing and sometimes even touching Jewish artifacts or writings, from a Torah scroll to Dubnov's Jewish history in Yiddish, from European menorahs to contemporary *huppot*—this encounter with material culture often does the magic. They gain a more pluralistic and historical view of Judaism and Jewishness and build a connection to the European past they thought at first to be so different and difficult to grasp.

Verena Kasper-Marienberg is assistant professor for Jewish and Early Modern History at North Carolina State University. Before coming to NC State, she taught at the Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz. Her book, 'vor Euer Kayserlichen Mayestät Justiz-Thron.' Die Frankfurter jüdische Gemeinde am Reichshofrat in josephinischer Zeit (1765–1790) (StudienVerlag, 2012), focused on Jewish legal cases at the Supreme Court of the Holy Roman Empire in the eighteenth century and won the Rosl and Paul Arnsberg-Preis, the highest prize given for Jewish Studies in Germany.

Elizabeth Loentz *University of Illinois at Chicago*

The University of Illinois at Chicago is considered one of the five most diverse campuses in the United States. We have no racial majority and are designated by the Department of Education as a Minority-Serving, Hispanic-Serving, and Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution. Our most recent "Entering Student Survey" revealed that: English is not the first language for about a third of our students (sixty-two different languages were named as first); we have no religious majority; and Jewish students make up only 0.8 percent of the entering class.

The introductory course that I have taught most frequently is Introduction to Yiddish Culture and Literature, a general education course with no prerequisites. The most difficult and uncomfortable idea for students in this course is that Jewish identity can be defined not only in religious terms but also as a national, cultural, ethnic, or racial identity, or various combinations of these, depending on the historical or cultural context, or simply on who is doing the defining. In this particular course, where students learned about Yiddishist and anti-Yiddish Zionists, Diaspora nationalists, Bundists, and contemporary Haredi Jews,

among others, becoming comfortable with the complexity of Jewish identity and the fact that some understandings of Jewish identity might challenge their contemporary (generally liberal) American sensibilities was imperative.

The diversity of students participating in my course and their willingness to talk about their own experiences opened up possibilities to consider different understandings of Jewishness and also ways in which their own identities were contingent, “messy,” contradictory, or difficult to define. The fact that the majority of students who take the course are not Jewish allowed us to consider connections or comparisons that might have been missed or less meaningful in more homogenous groups. The following are just a few examples. In one class, an Assyrian student volunteered that Assyrians were like pre-Israel Yiddish-speaking Jews—a stateless people/nation, who speak a language that is not the official language of any country. An African American student told us that she had been so engrossed in the *Memoirs of Glikl of Hameln* that she missed her stop on the bus—because the way that Glikl talked reminded her so much of her deeply religious (Christian) Afro-Caribbean grandmother. Two Jain students could speak of the practical challenges of strict dietary laws. When we read a story about a newly married woman who resisted the expectation to cover her hair, Muslim women in my class weighed in on how religious women could embrace a tradition that seemed misogynistic to others while at the same time considering themselves to be feminists. When we read *The Dybbuk*, I shared a recent *New York Times* article about reports of a talking carp in a Hasidic community, who claimed to be the troubled soul of a recently deceased community elder. When a few students started to laugh, a Catholic Latino student reminded his peers that Christians who believed in the Resurrection and in other miracles were similarly called on to accept the supernatural.

Elizabeth Loentz teaches at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She is the author of Let Me Continue to Speak the Truth: Bertha Pappenheim as Author and Activist (Hebrew Union College Press, 2007); and she is currently writing a second book, The Meaning of Yiddish in 20th-Century Germany. Prior to her doctoral studies, she taught unaccompanied refugee minors in Hallbergmoos, Germany.

Shaul Magid Indiana University Bloomington

A few years ago two students came to my office hours to talk about a course I regularly teach entitled Jews, Christians, Muslims. In the course of our conversation one of them asked, “Can I ask you a personal question?” Hesitantly, I responded, “Yes.” The student continued, “Are you a Muslim?” A bit taken aback, I responded that I am not sure I could answer the question but I wondered why he asked. He said that the other day in lecture I had said something quite positive about Islam and its devotion to monotheism, which made a number of students posit that I must be a Muslim. I informed him that saying something positive, even laudatory, about a religion or belief system does not make one an adherent to that religion or belief system.

When teaching religion, any religion, our students often wonder what we are. Do we believe what we teach? Is our presentation a defense or a critique of the subject at hand? I don’t suppose this is a prevalent in courses on Shakespeare (“are you a sonnet?”) and certainly not in chemistry (“are you an amino acid?”), or perhaps even analytic philosophy (“are you a fact?”), but teaching religion (“are you religious, a believer, if so, what kind?”) evokes this kind of curiosity. Many of us simply choose not to disclose “what we are.” But that too has a pedagogical price, one that may shut down an important opportunity.

When I studied Hebrew Bible with Moshe Greenberg in Jerusalem in the 1980s he always refused to answer questions about what he believed in regard to the Bible. But once a semester he would invite us to his home in the evening and we were free to ask him anything we wanted. This illustrated for me a version of a famous apocryphal adage about when a student saw Henrich Graetz walking to synagogue on Purim carrying a scroll of Esther. The student approached Graetz and said, “Excuse me, Herr Professor, but didn’t you teach us just last week that the story of Esther never happened (*lo hayah ve-lo nivra*)?” Graetz said without any irony, “Religion is one thing, scholarship is another thing (*dat le-ḥud ve-mehkar le-ḥud*),” and continued walking.

In today’s multidisciplinary and identitarian times, our students would likely not be satisfied with such compartmentalizing. And neither are many of us. Greenberg didn’t want “what he was” to be in the classroom, only the living room. But “what we are” is in the classroom, although making that evident

does not necessarily enhance the learning process. As Greenberg probably thought, it may very well serve as a distraction. Thus, what challenge does the question “What are you?” pose to us as scholars, as believers or disbelievers, sometimes believers, half-believers, or whatever? One possibility is to interrogate the notion of situational thinking, or thinking from a point of view without being inextricably wed to that point of view, as a model of “thinking religion.” That is, to convey to our students that seeking objectivity and being objective are different, that we can think, argue for, and even defend something we don’t believe in (e.g., I can praise Islam without being a Muslim). We could convey that intellectual rigor does not require an empty vessel, or an empty heart.

The lesson, perhaps, is that we, like them, are struggling beings, thinking subjects in the warp and woof of simply trying to figure out how to be human. That in the broad scheme of things, we are not that different from them and that the distinction between teaching and learning is far less stable than we are led to believe?

What students want to know and what they need to know are not identical. They want to know “what we are” to put us in a box so that they can assess how to receive what we say. Perhaps our response should be to interrogate and critique the question. It is not that “what I am” doesn’t matter. It certainly does, surely to me! It is to say, rather, that I can think *from* what I am and what I believe without the need to *defend* those beliefs. Not only will that help them do the same but it may also *change* who I am. Allotting thought the power to effect change is part of humanistic education. But as important, thinking outside “what we are” has the power to change what we are. And, as Socrates might have said, that may be the most beautiful, and most precarious, dimension of teaching. And living.

Shaul Magid is the Jay and Jeanie Schottenstein Professor of Jewish Studies and professor of Religion at Indiana University Bloomington. He is also a Kogod Senior Research Fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America. His most recent book is Hasidism Incarnate: Hasidism, Christianity, and the Making of Modern Judaism (Stanford University Press, 2015). His forthcoming book is A Voice Calls: The Talmud and the New Testament, Elijah Zvi Soloveitchik’s Commentary to the New Testament (Yale Judaica Classics).

Tzvi Novick

University of Notre Dame

Most of the students who enroll in my Introduction to Judaism are theology majors, usually with a Catholic background. These students identify with the church and with the Catholic past, and therein lies one of the challenges I face in teaching my Introduction to Judaism: how to confront the history of Christian antisemitism. It is not a topic on which I dwell at length, because I take this history to be an extrinsic condition for the development of Jewish thought. That is to say, Jewish thought has been (partly) determined by the fact of antisemitism, but in its particular manifestations, antisemitism tells us little about Judaism, or in any case, little that cannot better be addressed from the sources of Judaism themselves. But I do take note of antisemitism at various points, in connection with Judaism of both the medieval Christian and the medieval Muslim worlds, and of course in connection with modernity and the Holocaust. Discussion of Christian antisemitism inevitably makes students uncomfortable. This discomfort is a good thing—one should be made uneasy by the sins of the past (or present) with which one identifies—and I cannot say that I make any special effort to mitigate it, as it is, I take it, obvious to all class participants that we enter on the topic in a spirit of mutual respect and good faith.

The other side of the coin concerns the ways in which I present Judaism to the class. The students, typically self-selected by their engagement with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council or, more mundanely, by experiences with Jewish family and/or friends, come to the course inclined, in general, to view Judaism very positively. I find myself tempted, naturally, to confirm these inclinations. This temptation is reinforced by the theological context in which I teach, insofar as theology encourages constructive (in both senses of the word) engagement with religious tradition rather than exclusively (but hardly to the exclusion of) historicizing or critical engagement with it. My own personal commitments, as a Jew, make the temptation toward apologetics still greater. The accumulated temptation is not altogether to be resisted, and I do not resist it altogether. We do read invocations of divine vengeance in Byzantine piyyut and in the Mainz Anonymous Chronicle, and we

do, following Naomi Seidman, deconstruct Elie Wiesel's *Night* through comparison with its earlier Yiddish instantiation. But I offer Judaism with only some of its warts, not all.

Teaching the course this past fall, I have exposed another source of discomfort, perhaps more urgent than the above two. In my course, I present the challenges of Jewish modernity as a special case of the challenges of modernity in general. The Mendelssohnian solution to modernity, I tell them, came under threat from the same forces that challenged Western liberalism in general, and that found expression in Bundism, in Rosenzweig's community of blood, and in other ways. *Came*, I say, but now I also say *comes*, as current political conditions once again, but in new ways, expose the blind spots and instabilities of the modern liberal state. My students and I are confronting this unsettling reality together.

Tzvi Novick is an associate professor in the Department of Theology at the University of Notre Dame, where he occupies the Abrams Chair of Jewish Thought and Culture. His research focuses on law and ethics in rabbinic literature, and on the liturgical poetry of late antique Palestine. He is the author of What Is Good and What God Demands: Normative Structures in Tannaitic Literature (Brill, 2010).

Lisa Silverman

University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

Over the past ten years, I have taught an undergraduate course titled Introduction to Jewish History from Antiquity to the Present. My students are mainly Christians from the Midwest, who have had little to no contact with Jews before coming to campus. Nearly every semester, some students express discomfort with referring to the very people on whom we are focusing: Jews. To be sure, their discomfort invariably stems from good intentions. They just have a gut feeling that writing the word “Jews” is offensive but they aren't sure why. I typically use this opportunity as a moment for critical engagement: Is the problem the word “Jews”? Or is it just using the article “the” before it? I often find the most effective pedagogical examples to be drawn from current events, and for better or worse, the 2016 US presidential election yielded plenty of material to address the issue. Luckily, the students didn't need

much convincing to see how Republican candidate Donald Trump's frequent references to “the African-Americans” and “the Latinos” at his rallies were indeed offensive. In class, we discuss how such references lump together members of groups as undifferentiated entities. Students learn that referring to groups in this way serves to distance the speaker from those groups, and thus serves to both marginalize and dehumanize its members. By the time we get to the Holocaust, students can better understand how the Nazis used language as a key facet to persecute their Jewish victims. At the same time, I am always careful to point out that not every reference to “Jews” or even “the Jews” is necessarily offensive. For examples, we look at how authors we read in class use the term, or even how I used it myself on the syllabus or on their exams. From these discussions, I believe they learn important lessons about context. Words matter. Language reflects feelings, and what one says is a reflection of how one acts. As distasteful as it was to have so many examples to draw on from current events this year, I have to admit that I'm thrilled that such a relevant and important lesson about the dangers of essentializing can emerge from my Jewish history class.

Lisa Silverman is associate professor of History and Jewish Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. She is currently working on a study of Jews in postwar Europe, 1945–1953, in Austria, France, and Germany. She is the author of Becoming Austrians: Jews and Culture between the World Wars (Oxford, 2012).

AJS INSTITUTIONAL RECORDS NOW AVAILABLE THROUGH THE AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives (AJA) is pleased to announce that the records of the Association for Jewish Studies (AJS) were received by the AJA in May 2016.

The records constitute the most comprehensive collection of the largest learned society and professional association of Jewish Studies scholars worldwide.

The collection includes board minutes, newsletters, correspondence, conference material, abstracts, and programs, along with audio tapes of conferences and other materials from 1970 through 2006.

The AJS papers are open and available for research in the historic Barrows-Loebelson Reading Room of the American Jewish Archives. A finding aid, listing the contents of the collection, is available through the AJA's online catalog, AmericanJewishArchives.org.



The AJS collection includes correspondence, meeting minutes, and print material like this 1970 newsletter.

“The papers of the AJS document the development of the field of Jewish Studies on a global level. They are critical to our understanding of the place of Jewish Studies—past, present, and future. We are most honored to have been selected to preserve and protect these priceless materials in perpetuity.”

—*Dr. Gary P. Zola, AJA executive director and Edward M. Ackerman Family Distinguished Professor of the American Jewish Experience & Reform Jewish History at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati*

“As a scholar who has relied upon the AJA for so many of my own projects, I am delighted that the AJS collection has found its home at The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives. Scholars in the future will turn to the AJS collection to research the emergence and growth of Jewish Studies around the nation and globe and into diverse new arenas. Here too, they will find crucial materials shedding light on the wider history of American academe.”

—*Pamela S. Nadell, Patrick Clendenen Chair in Women's and Gender History, American University and AJS president*

“The papers of the Association for Jewish Studies shed important light on the growth and transformation of Jewish Studies since the 1960s. The collection complements the many other papers of Jewish scholars now repositied in the American Jewish Archives. The first stop for anyone intent on studying the history of Jewish scholarship in the United States should now be the AJA in Cincinnati.”

—*Jonathan D. Sarna, Joseph H. & Belle R. Braun Professor of American Jewish History at Brandeis University and immediate past president of AJS*

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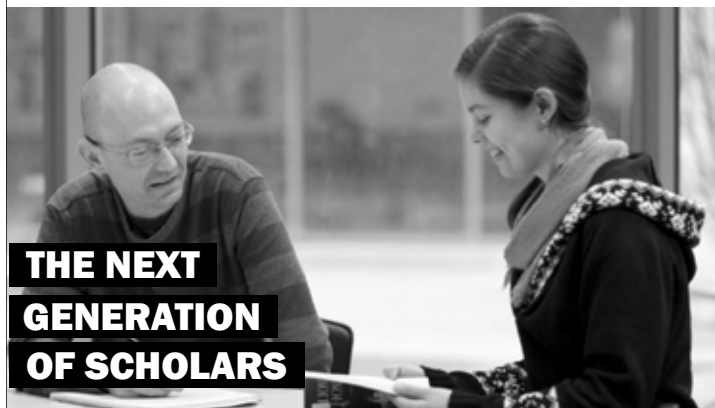
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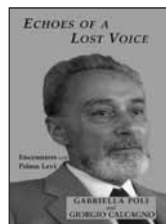
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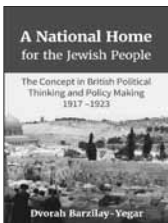
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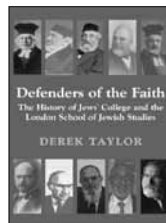
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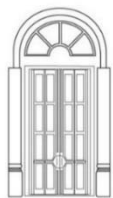
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Herbert D. Katz Center
for Advanced Judaic Studies
UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

THEME

In 2018–2019, the Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania devotes its fellowship to the study of Jews in modern Islamic contexts.

The fellowship will support scholarship on Jewish life, culture and thought as these have developed in modern times across North Africa, the Levant, the Arabian Peninsula, and Central and South Asia. We will question the meaning of modernity beyond the more familiar European, American, and Israeli contexts and welcome research projects that address topics from the sixteenth century and later.

The goals for the year are to bridge linguistic, geographic, social, and methodological boundaries, to connect the study of the intellectual with the study of the everyday, and to encourage attention to new sources and approaches. We seek applications from a range of disciplinary orientations: history, textual study, anthropology, art history, media studies, and other fields that expand or redefine the parameters of the topic.

Eligible projects may focus on the complex relationships between Jews and their Muslims neighbors, or with members of various other non-Muslim or minority communities in the Islamic world. Also relevant is research that explores Jews' participation in various forms of local, regional, national, colonial, and imperial forms of governance in modern North Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia, as well as projects focused on gender relations, economic behavior, cultural expression, religious life and scholarship as these developed across diverse Islamic contexts.

ELIGIBILITY

The Katz Center invites applications from scholars in the humanities, social sciences, and the arts at all levels (Ph.D. must be in hand by August 2018).

AWARDS & APPOINTMENTS

Fellowships are awarded either for a full academic year or one semester (fall or spring). Stipend amounts are based on academic standing and financial need.

2018–2019

JEWISH LIFE IN MODERN ISLAMIC CONTEXTS

To apply, please visit
katz.sas.upenn.edu

Email: Elizabeth Martin
Fellowship Administrator
martinev@upenn.edu

Herbert D. Katz Center
420 Walnut St
Philadelphia, PA 19106

DEADLINE: OCTOBER 31, 2017



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Congratulations

Special Initiatives Grant Recipients

The American Academy for Jewish Research is pleased to announce the winners of its Special Initiatives Grant.

AAJR provides grants for no more than \$5,000 to faculty at North American universities to, 1) encourage projects of academic collaboration between Jewish studies programs and colleagues between two or more institutions, Or, 2) enable scholarly endeavors that would not otherwise receive funding.

Lila Corwin Berman, *American Jewish Historical Society*; Hasia Diner, *Goldstein-Goren Center for American Jewish History*; and Gary Zola, *Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives*

American Jewish History & the World: Third Biannual Graduate Student Workshop

Isaac L. Bleaman, *New York University*; Ayala Fader, *Fordham University*

New York Working Group on Jewish Orthodoxies

Francesca Bregoli, *CUNY-Queens College and the Graduate Center*; Elisheva Carlebach, *Columbia University*; Flora Cassen, *University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill*; Debra Glasberg, *New York University*; Joshua Teplitsky, *SUNY-Stony Brook*; Magda Teter, *Fordham University*; Ruth von Berth, *University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill*

Early Modern Workshop: Resources in Jewish History (EMW)

Center for Jewish History

Scholars Working Group Program

Jessica Marglin, *University of Southern California*

California Working Group on Jews in the Maghrib and the Mediterranean

Ira Robinson, *Concordia University*

Approaches to Teaching Jewish Studies in the Twenty-First Century: Examining best practices in curricular design

The American Academy for Jewish Research (www.aajr.org) is the oldest professional organization of Judaica scholars in North America. Its membership represents the most senior figures in the field.



AMERICAN ACADEMY FOR JEWISH RESEARCH

CONGRATULATIONS

Salo Baron Prize Winner

The American Academy for Jewish Research is pleased to announce the winner of its annual Salo Baron Prize for the best first book in Jewish studies published in 2016. The prize, including a \$5,000 award presented at the annual luncheon at the AJS Conference, will honor:

**Jessica M. Marglin, *Across Legal Lines: Jews and Muslims in Modern Morocco*
Yale University Press**

Using a trove of documents from one important Jewish family from Fez, Marglin opens up a new perspective on the permeable boundaries between Jews and Muslims in nineteenth-century Morocco before colonial reforms abruptly curtailed their legal mobility. We are surprised to learn that Jews were adept at shari'a law and advocated for themselves in Muslim courts. Their ability to pursue their interests here as well as in Jewish and consular courts contributes to an expanded vision of legal pluralism and an enhanced understanding of how Jews operated in an unequal but integrated society. *Across Legal Lines* is written with wit and élan in style that invites both general and scholarly readers.

Honorable Mention is awarded to: Maya Barzilai, *Golem: Modern Wars and Their Monsters*, New York University Press

The American Academy for Jewish Research (www.aajr.org) is the oldest professional organization of Judaica scholars in North America. Its membership represents the most senior figures in the field.

The Baron Prize honors the memory of the distinguished historian Salo W. Baron, a long-time president of the AAJR, who taught at Columbia University for many decades. It is, according to Professor Gershon Hundert, current president of the AAJR, one of the signal honors that can be bestowed on a young scholar in Jewish studies and a sign of the excellence, vitality, and creativity in the field.



AMERICAN ACADEMY FOR JEWISH RESEARCH

Congratulations

Graduate Student Summer Funding Recipients

The American Academy for Jewish Research is pleased to announce the winners of its grant for graduate student summer research funding.

AAJR provides stipends for no more than \$4,000 to graduate students in any field of Jewish Studies at a North American university who have submitted their prospectus and have a need to travel to collections to conduct research.

Mazalit Haim, New York University

Between Lament and Hope: Affect and Politics in the Work of Y. H. Brenner and Yehuda Amichai

Sara Halpern, Ohio State University

Goodbye, Shanghai!: The Emigration of European Jewish Families, 1945-1951

Jordan R. Katz, Columbia University

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Charles A. McDonald, New School for Social Research

Return to Sepharad: Jewish Revivalism and the Pragmatics of Inclusion in Spain

Ming Hui Pan, Concordia University

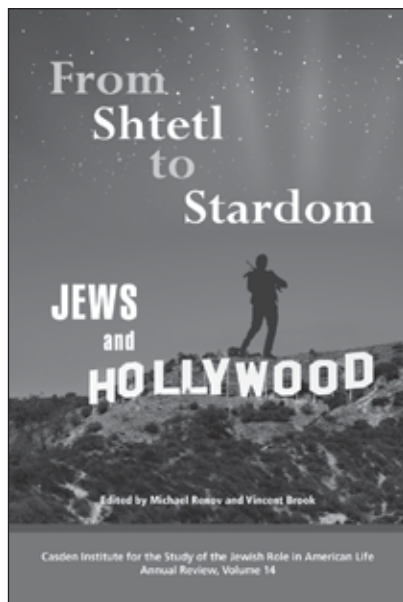
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Eleanor Shapiro, Graduate Theological Union

Performing Jewishness: Jewish Cultural Festivals in Polish Small Towns

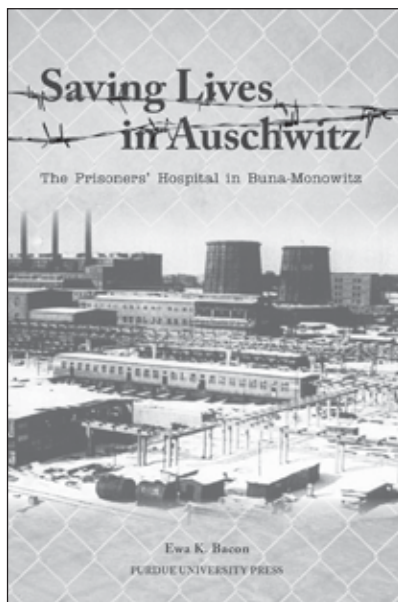
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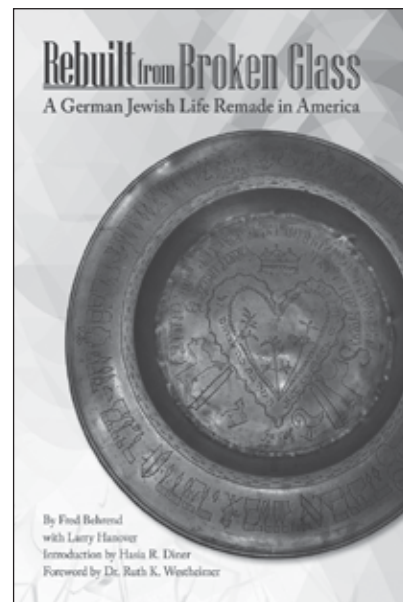
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