

Fall 2012



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From the Director's Desk

Friends:

I'm delighted to write you at a remarkable time for the Institute. Our programs are growing by leaps and bounds; our students are doing wonderful and challenging work; and our faculty – seasoned, new, and visiting – are continuing to do exciting things both in and out of the classroom.

Our undergraduate programming continues to attract an ever-expanding student body. This fall, we've put a particular emphasis on Israeli film, with discussions and screenings ranging from the serious to the surreal (a late night showing of Israel's number one zombie comedy). On a more serious note, undergraduate oriented talks by leading thinkers Gershon Gorenberg, Yossi Klein Halevi, and Israel Prize winner David Tartokover, have kept the students up to date on the very latest developments in Israeli history and geopolitics. Many of the students who attended these events were recipients of our Israel Fellowship; almost twenty students were in Israel last summer under Institute auspices, and, for the first time, a designated in-country coordinator arranged a series of intellectually and socially stimulating events for them including, among others, an intimate sit down with Isabel Kershner of the *New York Times*. And we're planning an even more popular and robust program next summer!

Closer to home, thanks to a generous grant from the Jim Joseph Foundation, the Institute has initiated groundbreaking work in new media teaching in the field of Jewish studies; a two-day conference this fall gathered scholars interested by and experienced in the topic from all over the country, and we hope the Institute will continue to be a leader in this field for many years to come. As our faculty is deeply committed to every aspect of Jewish Studies, we continually seek to develop new courses and new areas of study along with bringing cutting edge research to familiar and central grounds of study. Israeli film, medieval Jewish philosophy, gender and American Jewish literature, the politics of the Israeli Knesset, and the Jewish music of New York were just a few of the diverse topics taught by visiting faculty; and when you add these to the over twenty courses taught by full-time faculty members in 2012 alone, you can imagine the vibrant opportunities are available for our students on campus.

Our calendar of public events, past and present, is available for all to peruse on our website, and the record of those events, we hope, demonstrates a commitment to fostering an active discussion of the best that has been thought and said about Jewish history, literature, and culture over the many centuries. We hope to see you at some of those events – and we very much hope to hear from you, your advice, your insights, and your suggestions.

My best wishes to you all for a happy Chanukah.

Sincerely yours,

Jeremy Dauber

Atran Associate Professor of Yiddish Language, Literature, and Culture
Director, Institute for Israel and Jewish Studies



Hebrew and Judaica Manuscript Collection Exhibition at Columbia Libraries (Image: Columbia University Libraries)

Celebrating our Graduate Students

Thanks to the generosity of our donors, we award special fellowships to deserving graduate students each year: the Bernard and Muriel Bloom Fellowship in Jewish Studies, the Irene C. Fromer Fellowship, and the Louise Hoffman Memorial Scholarship. The fellowships help our students with their research and support them in the difficult road to becoming world class experts in their field. We'd like to introduce this year's recipients to you.

Elyakim Kislev

Bernard and Muriel Bloom Fellowship in Jewish Studies

Elyakim's recent projects include an analysis of the levels of Israeli identification displayed by three groups of Israeli-born immigrants to the US: Israeli-Arabs, Ultra-Orthodox Jews, and the Jewish-majority and a comparison of Israeli-born Arabs with other ethnic minorities in terms of socio-economic assimilation in the US. The findings from the former project indicate that the two minority groups (Israeli-born Arabs and Ultra-Orthodox Jews) reveal a significant increase in Israeli identification in the last decade, while the Jewish majority reveals a surprising decrease. The latter project shows how a minority/majority background significantly affects the pace and rate in which individuals assimilate. His findings show that minorities have a lower starting point when coming to the US. However, they assimilate better than their parallel majority group and surpass them over time; breaking out the social constraints is a powerful positive incentive for a better assimilation.

Yitzhak Lewis

Bernard and Muriel Bloom Fellowship in Jewish Studies

Yitzhak has presented papers on J. L. Borges' attitude towards Zionism, and the role Israel plays as a double of his own Argentina in Borges' imagination. He has also worked on the perceptions of Halacha as "Law" in various Jewish traditions, from St. Paul to Moses Mendelssohn. In the fall he hopes to present a paper at the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem, on the role of messianism in the critical literature about Rabbi Nachman of Braslav. This paper attempts to shift the focus on the tales of Rabbi Nachman from his messianic speculation to his literary-political thought. Yitzhak is also preparing to defend his PhD prospectus in the fall.

Seth Anziska

Irene C. Fromer Fellow

Seth's dissertation, *Cold War Revival in the Middle East and the Re-making of American Foreign Policy, 1978-1988*, seeks to explain how the intersection of developments in the Middle East and U.S. foreign policy during the final decade of the Cold War reshaped the Arab-Israeli conflict and influenced the trajectory of the peace process in the 1990s and 2000s. He is also interested in the American Jewish community's relationship to Israel and Zionism during this critical decade, from the Camp David peace accords through the Lebanon war and the outbreak of the first *Intifada*. During the academic year, he is undertaking research at the Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan Presidential Libraries in the U.S., the Israel State Archive and Menachem Begin Heritage Center in Jerusalem, and the Institute for Palestine Studies in Beirut.

Jessica Kirzane

Louise Hoffman Memorial Scholarship

Recent papers include a critique of George Yancy's theory of racial embodiment through the use of Yiddish poetry and an analysis of early 20th century debates on the "Jewishness" of Jewish settlement houses. Jessica recently gave a talk at the Columbia University Hillel, presenting her work on Yiddish poetry and prose in which the lynching of African-Americans figures prominently. She demonstrated how Yiddish authors used the theme of lynching to explore their own experience as part of a victimized people and as members of white America — how the theme of lynching simultaneously displays their interest in themes prominent in American literature and journalism, while at the same time speaking to issues specific to the Jewish experience. Jessica will continue to explore questions of Jewish ethnic identification in Yiddish literature as her work progresses.

Spring 2012 IIJS Faculty Course Sampler

Israeli Film

Avner Faingulernt

Analyzed the main thrust and thematic evolution of Israeli documentary cinema since 1960.

Tradition: Growing Up in the Shtetl

David Assaf

Focused on traditional Jewish life, in the Eastern European towns known as shtetlekh, from the early modern period until late 19th century.

Hasidism in the Eyes of Opponents

David Assaf

A close look at the historical Hasidic movement, its doctrine, innovations and the nature of their leaders through the eyes of their ardent opponents, studied in light of the distorted mirror provided by polemic and satiric texts from the 1770s until the 1880s.

Zionism: A Cultural Perspective

Dan Miron

A view of Zionism as a cultural revolution aimed at redefining Judaism and Jewish identity.

Maimonides and Spinoza

Zev Harvey

Reading Maimonides' *Guide* together with Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* and his *Ethics*, the course focused on Spinoza's use and criticism of Maimonidean themes.

Medieval Hebrew Philosophic Texts

Zev Harvey

Readings from major medieval Hebrew philosophic works: Maimonides' (1138-1204) *Book of Knowledge*, Shemtob Falaquera's (c. 1225-1295) *Epistle of the Debate, Wars of the Lord* by Levi Gersonides (1288-1344), *Light of the Lord* by Hasdai Crescas (c. 1340-1410/11), and *Book of Principles* by Joseph Albo (d. after 1433).

Medieval & Early Modern Jewish Popular Culture

Jeremy Dauber

Through readings of material written in Hebrew and Yiddish in a variety of genres - chivalric romance, moralizing fable, supernatural folklore, Biblical exegesis, among others - investigates some of the imaginative life of early modern Jewry.

Noteworthy News

Jewish and Israel Graduate Student Association

This spring a group of ten graduate students from Columbia's *Jewish and Israel Studies Graduate Student Association* (JIGSA) travelled to Israel for a two-day colloquium at the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem. The colloquium was the outcome of a yearlong collaboration between JIGSA student organizers and Van Leer's division for Jewish Culture and Identity. The events marked a departure from both organizations' modus operandi: the Van Leer Institute sought to extend their reach to American graduate students, who usually find Israel beyond their conference travel budget, and JIGSA sought to introduce emerging scholars in the field of Jewish Studies to well-established Israeli academics.

Students attending the colloquium had the unparalleled opportunity to present their research and receive feedback from Israeli researchers in the field of Jewish Studies; they also met with some of their Israeli peers, bridging the Atlantic divide and bringing together the future of Jewish Studies academia from the United States and Israel. Columbia's own Prof. Uri Cohen and Prof. Jeremy Dauber participated among many well-known Israeli scholars.

Stuart Weinstock and **Avner Faingulernt**: *Men on the Edge: Fishermen's Diary* screening and director's Q&A
(right, from left to right)



Visiting Faculty

David Assaf *Krueger Visiting Professor, Institute for Israel & Jewish Studies* **Courses: Tradition: Growing Up in the Shtetl/Hasidism in the Eyes of Its Opponents**

David Assaf is a professor of modern Jewish History in the Department of Jewish History at Tel Aviv University. His field of expertise is the history and culture of the traditional Eastern European Jewish society, especially the history of Hasidism during the 19th century. The author of numerous books, Professor Assaf was the chair of the department of Jewish History at Tel Aviv University between 2004 and 2007 and since 2004 has been the Director of the Institute for the History of Polish Jewry at Tel Aviv University.

Avner Faingulernt **Course: Israeli Cinema**

Avner Faingulernt is the head of the Sapir College film and TV school and initiator and director of Cinema South Festival. He is also the chief editor of *Cinema South Notebook* magazine. His doctoral dissertation explores the father's figure in the modern European Journey films. Among his many credits are *War Matador* (2011, producer/director) and *Men on the Edge – Fishermen's Diary* (2005, producer/director).

Zev Harvey **Courses: Maimonides and Spinoza/Medieval Hebrew Philosophic Texts**

Zev Harvey is Professor Emeritus in the Department of Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He studied Philosophy at Columbia University (BA, 1965; Ph.D., 1973) and taught in the Department of Philosophy of McGill University (1971-1977), before moving to Jerusalem in 1977. He is the author of many studies on medieval and modern Jewish philosophy, including *Physics and Metaphysics in Hasdai Crescas* (1998), and is an EMET Prize laureate (2009).

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS from Spring 2012

Jan Lanicek

Czechs, Slovaks and the Jews, 1938-1948: Beyond Idealization and Condemnation

David Malkiel

Poetry and Art in the Hebrew Tombstones of Early Modern Padua

David Assaf

Hasidic Graphomania: The Strange Case of Rabbi Eliezer Shlomo Schick of Brooklyn-Yavne'el

Who are the 50 Funniest American Writers? *An Evening with Andy Borowitz, David Rakoff, and Sloane Crosley*

Co-sponsored by the Institute for Israel & Jewish Studies, The Library of America, and the Center for American Studies

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The institute provides a vibrant and stimulating environment for discussion on campus among students, faculty, alumni, and others. Lively intellectual discourse occurs not only within classroom settings, but in other venues as well. The institute interacts with other institutes and organizations on campus to engage as many individuals as possible on topics of importance to Israel and Jewish studies.

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