It happens so that this spring’s newsletter is out in the last week of term—well, this only means that it is more exhaustive than ever, and anyone interested will find the term’s news on the very next page.

The issue itself is full of inspiring texts. Some highlights include: a cute little story about the life of alumni; family history intertwined with the history of France during World War II; a tale of an old Jewish quarter in Lublin and its significance to the Lubliners of today. And there is more, so read on!

I’m also glad to introduce Imogen, the new co-editor—a very helpful and extremely modest one, be it noted.

And, of course, happy Purim to each and every one!

/Anna Mudrecova, Editor

Hi all, my name is Imogen, I like biscuits, and I’m a new face in the department: after a year at UCL studying ESPS I finally saw the HJS light, transferring at the beginning of this academic year. I’ve had a rather swift initiation into being this edition’s co-editor; I must admit I’m a little embarrassed to be bestowed with such an esteemed title. Reader, let me assure you: Anna did all the work. I merely provided a cheerleading role from the side. With that said: if anybody wants an autograph, I’ll be at the Purim party. And I’m always happy to take selfies with fans.

/Imogen Resnick, Co-Editor
We would like to congratulate:

- **Dr Tsila Abramovitz Ratner** on her latest book with Hannah Naveh from Tel-Aviv University on material culture and possessions of women as portrayed in late 19th and early 20th-centuries Hebrew literature. *Tzena, Tzena: In and About the Dowry Box, Hakibbutz Hamachad: Tel Aviv, 2015* (more info to follow)

- **Prof. Mark Geller** on his latest book with Luděk Vacín *Healing Magic and Evil Demons*. Prof. Geller is Principal Investigator of BabMed-Babylonian Medicine on secondment at the Freie Universität Berlin. 
  

- **Dr Lindsey Taylor-Guthartz** - who studied under Prof. Emerita Ada Rapoport-Albert and has contributed to this edition of the newsletter - on having successfully completed her Ph.D.!

- **Dr Ilana Wartenberg** on her latest book *The Epistle of the Number by Ibn al-Ahdab; The transmission of Arabic mathematics to Hebrew circles in medieval Sicily*. (more info to follow)

We also extend our heartfelt condolences to **Dr Lily Kahn** and James Holz whose dog Panda recently passed away.

In other news:

- **Dr Seth Anziska** will be spending 2016/17 as a postdoctoral fellow at New York University’s Taub Center for Israel Studies (where he will be working on his book manuscript. Dr Anziska recently published a report with Tareq Baconi, co-commissioned by the U.S./Middle East Project (USMEP) and the Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre (NOREF). To read the report go to:
  
  http://www.peacebuilding.no/var/ezflow_site/storage/original/application/37fbff97b1b31dad9b0f686fded6a175.pdf

- **The EAJS (Dr Francois Guesnet as Secretary)** is accepting submissions of event proposals for the EAJS Conference Grant Programme in European Jewish Studies. For more information go to:
  
  http://eurojewishstudies.org/homepage-announcements/call-for-submissions/

Follow us on twitter for more news about what’s happening in the Department @uclhjs
Grateful, creative HJS students

Below is the front cover of the card that students in the Intermediate Hebrew class made for their teacher, Mrs Shoshana Sharpe.
The unique brand of our Department is intuitively grasped, and highly prized by students, alumni, and staff; but we need to find ways of conveying it to the wider community, in London and internationally. How many people know that we are the only university department in the UK that is specifically devoted to Hebrew and Jewish Studies, and one of the very few of its kind in Europe? Is anyone aware, unless they have entered our corridor in Foster Court, of our friendly atmosphere, of the diversity of our staff and students, of our rich range of events and programmes? Does anyone know the variety of courses that we teach, and what we are up to in research? Can anyone sum up, in three sentences, what we stand for?

Branding has become a hot issue in recent months. Summing up what we are in three sentences is not an easy task, but it is essential for making ourselves known. Our website, frustratingly, does not meet up to the task. It is based on an outdated template that is standard and mandatory across UCL, which means that our hands are tied. The good news, however, is that UCL has announced a changeover of all its websites. This will give us new looks, better functionality, and many other advantages that I do not fully understand myself. The timetable we have been given for this ranges from six to eighteen months (!), but at least we can look forward to improvement.

In our present website, the tab that needs most attention is ‘Research’. If you hit it, you are directed to ‘research projects’, of which only one is current: ‘Calendars in Antiquity and the Middle Ages’, a major ERC (European...
Research Council) project that I run with five full-time researchers. Yet this is not the only research that goes on in our Department. All members of staff are involved in research of internationally leading quality, and publishing on a steady basis. Many of us are involved in international collaborations. For example, Tsila Ratner has just co-authored a book with a colleague from Tel-Aviv University, Hannah Naveh, on the material culture and possessions of women as portrayed in late 19th and early 20th-centuries Hebrew literature. Mark Geller has recently published a book on a Sumerian scholastic dialogue, which he has written with Cale Johnson of the Freie Universität Berlin. Further co-authored books, with international colleagues, are being written by other Department members. But research projects involving whole teams of researchers, such as the ERC project on calendars, are most conducive to collaboration, and particularly important to the Department (Mark Geller is also running a similar-scale ERC project in Berlin, on Talmudic medicine). Not only do these projects bring in new, additional research staff to the Department, with financial resources to support activities such as public lectures and workshops, but they also redefine entirely the conduct of academic research, and what research can achieve. I have written about this already in the Autumn 2012 Newsletter, so there is no need to repeat. The main point is that research teams mean collaboration on a grand scale. All my research of the last five years owes something to members of the research teams with which I have been working. I am immensely grateful for working with such colleagues; this is perhaps a good place to thank them.

Much of my research in the last four years has been centred on the Cairo Genizah. As is well

“Research teams mean collaboration on a grand scale.”
known, documents and manuscripts from the Cairo Genizah exist in the hundreds of thousands, some dating from as many as a thousand years ago; the largest holding is in the Cambridge University Library, but a large proportion of the Genizah is scattered in libraries in Oxford, New York, St Petersburg, Paris, London (yes! the British Library), and the list goes on. Not uncommonly, two fragments of the same manuscript can be found in different locations, which makes the task of reconstructing manuscripts all the more difficult.

Searching online Genizah databases leads to exciting discoveries, and this is where teamwork comes really handy. Courtesies are regularly exchanged in all directions. A few months ago, my colleague Nadia Vidro discovered a unique document, attesting to an ancient rabbinic calendar from before the present Jewish calendar was formed and finalized. She kindly passed it on to me, as this is my field, and I am now publishing it in the Journal of Jewish Studies. Incidentally, this is the first article, in this journal, ever to be published in Open Access, which will ensure that this discovery is widely publicized.

This is just one example of the frontline research in our Department. Michael Berkowitz’s Jews and Photography in Britain, which I mentioned briefly in the last Newsletter, is another example of pioneering research that has attracted a huge amount of attention in the academic community as well as in the wider public. Pioneering research: this what that our Department stands for. ✤
While the father of a bride-to-be should show his worth in monetary value, the girl herself needs to demonstrate her value in terms of proper femininity. And this is epitomised in the dowry objects and in the promise they hold for future married life. Just as a girl is destined to marry, and just as a woman is destined for running a proper family home, so all she does and produces is meant to set up fine dowry objects before her wedding and to expand them during marriage.

Alongside reflecting on the material dowry as an expression of the woman’s compliance with a model of femininity upon which she has been brought up, this book also deliberates on the literary representation of the symbolic meaning of dowry objects as an extension of women’s identity and an expression of desires and aspirations which cannot be easily contained in the regulatory discipline. The dowry is endowed with the girl/woman’s energies which generate products and representations of their identity, and these energies might initiate a process that escapes commodification and represents an individuality that shuns subjugation.

As such the dowry facilitates thinking of possible frictions between the prescribed meaning of its objects and their personal meaning for the woman who owns them, produces them, and uses them in the everyday of her marriage. The dowry and its objects are therefore extended tools to achieve, preserve and constantly verify a performativity of proper femininity. At the same time they are also an opportunity of personal expression which might prove to be problematic in the social framework of marriage.

Hannah Naveh / Tsila Abramovitz Ratner, *Tzena, Tzena: In and About the Dowry Box*, Hakibbutz Hameuchad: Tel-Aviv, 2015
Nakhes fun studentn
(and their children)

By Dr Helen Beer

I have always considered it a privilege to teach and feel so lucky that my passion for teaching has never waned.

On the other hand, I have been known to scratch my head when as academics, we are frequently asked to describe the impact that our work is having. I think of the ‘impact’ that my teachers, classes and some research have had on my life and I would argue that this is often a slow, uneven and evolving process.

One great result of a long teaching career is that students keep in touch or make contact after a long time. So imagine my delight when last month I received an email from Jonathan, an ex-student (2004). Unbeknown to me, he had married Sharon, whom he first met in one of my Yiddish classes. He wrote to me of the Yiddish things he and his wife are viewing online and what they are reading in Yiddish to their older children (aged 5 and 8).

But best of all was the news that Sharon had given birth to twins in December with the MOST gorgeous photo you can see below. In case you are curious, the twins are a yingele and a meydele.

A huge Mazl-Tov to Sharon and Jonathan and their family. Many thanks to Jonathan for writing… and for illustrating the impact of ‘impact’.

Ilana Wartenberg’s new book The Epistle of the Number by Ibn al-Ahdab; The transmission of Arabic mathematics to Hebrew circles in medieval Sicily has been recently published by Gorgias Press. It includes the study of the first known Hebrew treatise on algebra in Hebrew, which was composed by the polymath Isaac ben Solomon Ibn al-Ahdab in Syracuse.

Ilana’s book presents a first edition of the only surviving manuscript of The Epistle of the Number, an English translation, a mathematical commentary and lexicon as well as a survey of Ibn al-Ahdab’s life and historical circumstances in which he lived. The history of medieval Hebrew mathematics is still not entirely known so Ilana is very excited to have contributed to this fascinating field in her book, which was born from her Ph.D. dissertation from Paris and from Tel Aviv.
Some years ago on a visit to Israel, my wife and I went to Yad Vashem where we had not been for a while.

One new section dealt with the German occupation of Europe and displayed private photographs organised country by country.

When we came to the section on France I glanced at the panel and my eyes were taken to a photograph in the top left hand corner. This is the photograph attached.

My breath was literally taken away and I could not speak. Not a word would come out of my mouth.

The photograph was that of the wedding of my father’s cousin Bernard Zilbermann and took place in Paris in 1942. Although I had always kept in close contact with my father’s cousins in Paris since I was 14 years old, I had never seen it before.

On the left is his mother Esther (known as Mima Nessa), my paternal grandmother’s sister, Bernard, his wife Lisette (née Behar) and Mme. Behar.

Apart from the photograph itself, what also “blew me away” was the fact that the bride was wearing the yellow star “Juif” on her wedding dress. This was not one of the German rules and she must have sewn it on herself. Clearly she was making a statement.

In between the two World Wars there was military service in France, and Bernard and his three other brothers were all called-up at the beginning of the war.

Bernard was fortunate enough to be evacuated to England from Dunkirk and landed in Plymouth. He explained to his officer that he had family in London and wanted to stay in
England. His request was refused and together with over 100,000 French soldiers he was repatriated in the vain hope of bolstering a defensive line north of Paris.

Two of the other brothers were prisoners of war, and the youngest was demobilised and was in the Resistance.

When France fell, Bernard was demobilised and ended the war in a concentration camp.

On 17th December 1943 everyone in the photo was deported to Auschwitz on Convoy 63 from Drancy, the internment camp just outside Paris. By that time the couple had had a daughter Claudine born in April 1943. A further three members of the family, Bernard’s sister Adèle (née Zilbermann), her husband Henri Volf and their son Gilbert aged 2 ½ were also on the same convoy.

On the convoy there were 850 people, 505 of whom were killed immediately upon arrival. Only 31 of the remaining people (including Bernard) were alive at the moment of liberation. Another sister, Fanny Fineberg, was also deported on the same convoy and did not survive. Her husband, Isaac Fineberg, who was also her first cousin, as well as being my father’s first cousin, was deported on Convoy 44 on the 9th November 1942. He was from the Salonica branch of the family and as he was not a naturalised French citizen, he was deported earlier. Isaac was a very robust person and broke out from the wagon whilst it was still in France and escaped. He adopted a nom de guerre, Raymond Lejeune, and volunteered to work in Germany as he felt it was “safer” to be there than in France. He survived, as did their small son who had been placed in hiding with a non-Jewish family.

Bernard married a second time to Irène, who was also a survivor from Auschwitz. They had two children, one of whom, Jean-Jacques, is a well-known French film director whose films always have a Jewish theme.

It was Jean-Jacques who had this photograph and who had submitted it to Yad Vashem. It is also on display in the Mémorial de la Shoah in Paris.
As we say when giving out first marks: this is provisional. That is, this brief announcement is based on information that is subject to change.

I will be taking a year-long sabbatical for the upcoming academic year - this is my first full-year off of teaching since arriving at UCL in September, 1997.

Although I have yet to hear about a few of my applications, as of 22 March 2016 it looks like I will spend the fall in Washington, DC, as a William J. Lowenberg Fellow at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and spring term as a fellow of the Remarque Institute of New York University.

The Lowenberg Fellowship is for research specifically on American Jewry and the Holocaust. The segment of my project that I will pursue at the USHMM is Seeing the enemy: Photographic-industry perspectives on American Jews, emigres, and the Holocaust.

Making use of material collected in London and Oxford, and on earlier research excursions to Rochester, New York, Boston, Washington, and New York City, I will examine how the Eastman Kodak Company, based in Rochester, New York, and Polaroid, based in Boston, sought to use the expertise of those who were shut out or expelled from Nazi Europe in advancing photographic and vision technologies in order to enhance Allied military efforts during the Second World War. My work furthermore explores the integration of key scientists from both firms who were explicitly employed in military research and in photographic enterprises during the war. An overarching objective is to compare the 'war of sight' and reproduction of images in which the opponents were engaged during the war, which reveals a bundle of conflicts and contradictions. For instance, the Leica company, whose proprietor and chief executive was generally anti-Nazi, and personally saved or assisted at least 70 Jews, immeasurably aided the military prowess of the German armed forces. (Frank Dabba Smith has just completed a PhD on Leica during the Second World War at UCL.) Kodak, as a corporate entity, was reticent about taking in emigres, despite their obvious benefit to the company, and in some
instances stressed the non-Jewish religious characters of those deemed to be Jewish by the Nazis. Kodak’s head of research, Kenneth Mees (who received his PhD and taught at UCL), however, was very favorably disposed toward Jews and political enemies of the Nazis. The case may be made that Polaroid made perhaps the greatest contributions to the war effort of any US company, given the size and overall reach of the firm. The company also had an unusually proactive posture in recruiting Jewish scientists. But locally, in Boston, the non-Jewish establishment (such as though the Chamber of Commerce) accused Land and Polaroid of dishonesty and profiteering. While resident in the Washington, in addition to using the vast resources of the USHMM (on business and industry and the Holocaust), I plan to use the National Archives and Library of Congress, especially to gather information about Jewish scientists in photographic fields who worked for the War Department.

The chief perq of the Remarque Institute Fellowship is an apartment in Washington Square Park, where I will be resident from January to May 2017. I am especially thrilled to be in striking distance of Eisenberg’s, his favorite pastrami joint in New York (across from the Flatiron Building). I will mainly use my time there for research at the Center for Jewish History (around the corner from his apartment) and to complete a book exploring previously unrecognized relationships between Jews and photography.

Before leaving for the United States I will spend three months as a fellow of Yad Vashem, May-July 2016.

Please do keep in touch with me on email and let me know if you plan to be in any of these places.
Last summer I went to Poland to see the newly opened exhibition in the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw. Before going to Warsaw I decided to visit Lublin, today the largest city in south eastern Poland east of the Vistula River. Lublin had one of the largest and most significant of Jewish communities. It was one of the most important centres of Jewish life, commerce, culture and religious scholarship in eastern Europe. Jews received permission to settle here in the 14th century. Autonomy was granted to the Jews in regard to their own communal administration. The Kahal, this autonomous body was well established by the mid-16th century with a synagogue, cemetery, mikva, yeshivot and hedarim. Situated on a main trade route between western and eastern Europe, it was an important mercantile centre from 15th century onwards. The fairs were held twice annually and its market days attracted large numbers of merchants both from Poland and abroad. The Council of the Four Lands, established in 1580, the ruling political body of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth met during the fairs.

After the Chmielnicki Uprising in 1648/9 led by Bohdan Khmelnytsky, when Cossacks murdered 2,000 Jews in Lublin and devastated the surrounding areas, it took the community years to recover from this disastrous event.

In the late 18th century Lublin became the centre for Hasidism. One of the most famous Hasidic figures was the Seer of Lublin. Jews in Lublin became prosperous as commerce and industry expanded in the second half of 18th century.
When the Germans entered Lublin on 18th September 1939, there were about 40,000 Jews. When they left in 1944, only 200-300 Jews had managed to survive. Most were murdered in the gas chambers of Majdanek, a concentration camp outside the city. Before the Germans left Lublin they leveled the Jewish quarter to the ground. Future generations of Poles would not have any knowledge of the existence of their Jewish neighbours. The Soviets who occupied Poland from 1945–1989 continued this policy of silence about what had happened to the Jews. Since I told Dr François Guesnet of my intended visit to Lublin he suggested I should go and visit the Brama Grodska Gate in the old city.

The Brama Grodska Gate is one of the oldest gates in Lublin and is known as the Jewish gate because it used to be a passage way between the Christian and Jewish parts of Lublin. Now at one side of the Gate, there is a huge empty space concealing the memory of the Jewish district that once existed there for hundreds of years. Where there used to be houses, synagogues and market streets, there is a huge parking area, lawns and new roads. Much has just been concreted over.

After the fall of Communism in 1989 Poles became interested in their history. In 1990 a group of young artists moved into the abandoned ruin of the Gate knowing nothing of its history. The encounter with the Gate and its history changed their lives. They put advertisements on the web requesting information about the town prior to 1939 and were inundated with photographs, letters and street addresses which no longer existed. Over the years the Gate slowly turned into a place known as the Ark of Remembrance for future generations. The work they are doing is entirely of their own initiative to educate the region about the Holocaust and their neighbours—the Jews who lived there.

“The encounter with the Gate and its history changed their lives.”
The Gate has three permanent commemoration activities:

The commemoration of the liquidation of the Podzamcze ghetto when the names of hundreds of former inhabitants of the Jewish quarter are read out followed by a total blackout of the Podzamcze quarter.

The commemoration of the liquidation of the Jewish Orphanage when more than a hundred children and three of their wardens were taken outside the city and murdered. Every year a march is organised from the former orphanage building to the place where the children were murdered.

Day of Holocaust Remembrance and Counteracting Crimes against Humanity is celebrated on 19th April in Polish schools.

Here is a quote from the Gate booklet:

Jews who come here ask us, ‘Why do you do this? After all, you are not Jewish. You are Poles and the Jewish town is not your history.’ Poles ask us, ‘Why do you do this? After all, you are Poles and the Jewish town is not our history. Or maybe you are Jewish?’ We explain patiently that it is our common, Polish-Jewish history. To remember the murdered Jews you do not have to be Jewish.
Red Threads and Pouring Lead: Do Orthodox Jewish Women in London Practise Magic?

By Lindsey Taylor-Guthartz

As part of the research for my PhD thesis on ‘The Religious Lives of Orthodox Jewish Women in Contemporary London’, I conducted an informal, qualitative survey by means of questionnaires on more than 200 ‘folk customs’, circulated among Orthodox women between 2010 and 2013. I obtained 100 responses, and have been able to draw some preliminary conclusions about the prevalence of observance of such customs, their correlation with different age groups, and women’s attitudes to such practices. But one question in particular stands out: do Orthodox Jewish women in London actually engage in magical practices?

Many customs recorded in the questionnaire raise the question of whether some, at least, of these practices should be categorized as ‘magical’. Possible candidates include bley gisn, the practice of detecting and removing the influence of the evil eye by pouring molten lead into a glass of water,¹ and biting off the end of an etrog in order to conceive a male child.² Here we come up against the long-running anthropological debate about the definition of, boundary between, and interrelationships of the terms ‘magic’ and ‘religion’, and the role of rationality in both categories, as well as the relationship between these concepts and that of science.³

¹ 4% of respondents had done this; another 11% knew of it.
² 1% had done this, another 14% knew of it.
consideration. Though it is somewhat doubtful that a completely emic definition and interpretation of such practices could actually be achieved by anthropologists (whose field of study is itself an irredeemably etic project), it is undeniable that elucidating the internal understandings of cultural phenomena is essential. This is complicated when considering Jewish practices by the fact that there is no single Jewish definition of magic, or even any agreement as to where the boundary between permitted and forbidden practices lies—a phenomenon equally familiar in modern Western culture, as Gideon Bohak observes: ‘a quick glance at the relevant literature will reveal that scholars and lay-persons alike can hardly agree on what we mean by “magic”, that is, on the emic definition of this term within our own [modern Western] culture.’ My interest lies in women’s understandings and practice of these customs, which often reveal tensions between Jewish and non-Jewish definitions of magic, as well as between different Jewish definitions: for instance, in the interpretation of affixing a mezuzah, what might seem to be a divinely ordained commandment to an Orthodox woman might be classed as a classic apotropaic magical practice by an academic rationalist. I therefore propose to use a fairly generalized etic definition alongside a range of emic definitions, and to examine the relationship between them. The definition of magic used here is therefore a ‘common sense’ one, as widely understood in the non-academic, Western world: magic consists of practices and beliefs that imply ‘a more active control of the environment than simply requesting the deity to intercede’, and are often of an ‘irrational’ nature that ignores scientific concepts of causality; it often involves rituals, verbal formulae, and the manipulation of objects. In contrast to this definition lies the shifting and negotiable field of Jewish attitudes...
to and definitions of magic, the origins of which are masterfully portrayed by Bohak in *Ancient Jewish Magic*. He notes that ‘not only is the Hebrew Bible far from systematically outlawing all forms of magic, it even lays the foundations for the development of some specifically Jewish magical technology’,


8 Ibid., ch. 6.

9 Ibid., 428.

10 For a discussion of this category, see ibid., 382-5. Not all the practices listed as belonging to it (e.g. in BT *Shabat* 6-7) would

superstitions practiced solely by the ignorant masses. Rather, it was a technology mastered by many specialists and lay persons and accepted, and even utilized, by the religious establishment itself.9

Later attempts, such as that made by Maimonides (1138-1204), to delegitimize magical practices and brand them as idolatrous or as *darkhei ha'emoni*, ‘ways of the Amorites’—a loose category applied by the talmudic rabbis to practices of which they did not approve10—did not meet with unqualified success. Maimonides’ strictures against magic *sensu stricto* and the magical performance and interpretation of the commandments form part of his wider battle against mystical, proto-kabbalistic trends in the Judaism of his time, which provided the necessary conceptual basis for the acceptance of magic. Ultimately his reform campaign did not succeed, and the essentialist, kabbalistic

fall into the etic category of magic used here, but it is interesting to note that one practice mentioned is that of tying red thread on people or things—familiar to four-fifths of my survey sample.
worldview largely prevailed, and has been normalized in the haredi world. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries anti-magic attitudes made considerable headway in Jewish communities that were more open to their host societies in the West, where post-Enlightenment conceptions of rationality and the authority of science held sway, but failed to make much impression in those communities untouched by the Enlightenment or that chose to react against it, such as the traditional communities of Eastern Europe, and ultimately, the haredi world.

Given this background of solid support and precedents for Jewish magic in central Jewish texts, it is perhaps not surprising that magical or quasi-magical activity (using our etic definition) is not only tolerated but quite common in the British Orthodox Jewish community, particularly in the haredi sector, nor that it is often not regarded as magical by its practitioners. Compared with much rabbinic or mediaeval Jewish magic, the practices of the women who responded to my questionnaire were quite low-key: I found no trace of any aggressive or erotic magical practices. Most practices were apotropaic or protective in nature, promoting marriage, fertility, easy childbirth, health, and general welfare—all non-controversial aims central to most Jewish women’s understanding of their roles. A conspicuous departure from classical Jewish magical techniques was the sparse amount of written and verbal activity used by these women: classical Jewish magic focuses upon the recitation of spells and formulae (sometimes involving biblical verses) and the

“I found no trace of any aggressive or erotic magical practices.”

11 See Kellner, Maimonides’ Confrontation with Mysticism (Oxford, 2006).
writing of amulets and other magical documents. In contrast, only 29 customs from my survey involved recited or written words in any form (magical or not), falling into three groups:

**Group 1**
- Pray in one’s own words (under the marriage canopy for others to marry; during labour for others to have children; at the grave of Rabbi Yonatan ben Uziel in order to find a mate; for 40 days at the Western Wall to obtain one’s desire)
- Recite biblical or classical texts (Psalms, Song of Songs, Perek shirah - to get married; when pregnant; during labour; to heal sickness; to obtain one’s desire; recite a biblical verse beginning and ending with the first and last letters of one’s name in the Elokai netsor section of the Amidah prayer)

**Group 2**
- Wear an amulet
- Place the name of a sick person under the circumcision pillow
- Place a prayerbook or ‘holy book’ under the pillow during pregnancy
- Place a copy of the book No’am elimelekh under pillow during birth
- Check mezuzot for errors (against the evil eye; in cases of illness; in case of infertility; to get married; for any problem)

- Recite the liturgy or *tikkun* (Yiddish prayers, recited to get pregnant; say liturgical phrases with devotion to obtain one’s desire)
- Recite ‘special prayers’ during pregnancy

**Group 3**
- Place the name of a sick person under the circumcision pillow
- Place a prayerbook or ‘holy book’ under the pillow during pregnancy
- Place a copy of the book No’am elimelekh under pillow during birth
- Check mezuzot for errors (against the evil eye; in cases of illness; in case of infertility; to get married; for any problem)

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12 At Amuka, in Israel.
13 The ‘holy book’ may be Sefer raziel hamalakh, a mediaeval kabbalistic grimoire, often used for protecting pregnant women; a message on the EdgwareK email list posted by a woman in November 2011 asked to borrow a copy of this (misprinted as *Raziel hamelekh*! and of No’am elimelekh ‘for a few weeks’, clearly for this purpose.
14 A well-known hasidic Torah commentary by R. Elimelekh of Lyzhansk (1717-87).
- Check parents’ ketubah (marriage contract) for errors if experiencing difficulty in getting married\footnote{I have found no other reference to this belief, though there seems to be a (modern) kabbalistic belief that mistakes in a ketubah can cause childlessness.}

\textit{Group 3}

- Boys come to house to recite Shema and/or Psalms in the week before a circumcision
- Study the Zohar and/or sing songs the night before a circumcision
- Receive a blessing from a ‘holy rabbi’ to get pregnant
- Read \textit{maftir}\footnote{The ‘additional’ Torah reading; the man honoured with this also reads the prophetic portion.} on Yom Kippur for prosperity in the coming year
- Say the \textit{atah horeita} verses\footnote{A series of biblical verses recited when the Torah scrolls are taken out of the Ark before the hakafot (circuits), during which men carry and dance with the scrolls.} on Simhat Torah for prosperity in the coming year

It is apparent that most texts to be recited are either prayers from the standard liturgy or \textit{tkhines}, biblical or classical texts, or personal prayer on behalf of oneself or others. No magical texts appear at all in the first group. The second group reveals the use of written material as amulets or in an amuletic manner, approximating more closely to classic Jewish magical techniques. However, the women only use, and do not produce, the texts involved (nor do they even read them), and except for the use of amulets (of unspecified character) and the possible use of \textit{Sefer razi’el hamalakh}, a classic magical text, all the texts used are non-magical in nature: the prayerbook, a hasidic Torah commentary, \textit{mezuzot}, a slip of paper with an individual’s name, and the ketubah. The checking of \textit{mezuzot} and the parents’ ketubah reflects an (etically defined) magical principle that written words have power in and of themselves, strongly supported by classical Jewish sources that view Hebrew as ‘the language of creation’ and immensely powerful;\footnote{e.g. in \textit{Sefer yetsirah} (of early though uncertain date), the thought of Judah Halevi (c. 1075-1141), for which see Kellner, \textit{Maimonides’ Confrontation}, 155-8, and in kabbalistic tradition.}
though Maimonides, who has a non-essentialist view of Hebrew, might argue about this, it would be difficult to classify it as a magical belief in emic terms. The third group actually includes customs associated with men; they cannot be classified as women’s practices even though they were reported by women.

Though several practices from the survey could be classed as magical in terms of a ‘common sense’ etic definition, Jewish women think about the wide range of customs reported in much more diverse and nuanced ways than merely classing them as ‘magical’ or ‘non-magical’. Their attitudes include complete, uncritical trust in the practices’ efficacy and belief in their authenticity; reinterpretation of practices in psychological or spiritual terms; the imposition of a sharp division between ‘halakhic’ or meritorious practices and ‘superstitions’ or even harmful practices; uncertainty about their effectiveness, leading to performance as a kind of insurance policy; and acceptance of the ‘common sense’ view of these practices as ‘magical’ and ‘superstitious’.

When asking whether Jewish women practise magic, therefore, our first question should be: ‘According to whose definition of magic?’, and our second: ‘How do the women themselves understand what they are doing?’.

“Jewish women think about the wide range of customs reported in much more diverse and nuanced ways than merely classing them as ‘magical’ or ‘non-magical’.”

19 Kellner, Maimonides’ Confrontation, 159-78.
Happy Purim!

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Have a nice and relaxing break!