SPECIAL EDITION DEDICATED TO PROFESSOR EMERITA AND FORMER HEAD OF DEPARTMENT, ADA RAPOPORT-ALBERT
Editor’s Note

I lost a lot of sleep the other night, lying on my back in bed trying to recall what my life was like three years ago. It turned into a somewhat Proustian experience as I slowly, internally reconstructed, events, places, faces, relationships now long gone. One memory triggering another. These days, we are often reminded by the digital media industry to photograph and back-up every waking moment in order to be able to remember our hectic existence. However, I found merely meditating, racking dormant synapses as I floated towards unconsciousness, a surprisingly refreshing exercise. And I haven’t even been around accumulating memories for that long.

As many readers are no doubt aware, this edition of the Departmental Newsletter is dedicated to somebody who has been around UCL far longer than myself; retired Head of Department Professor Ada Rapoport-Albert, who is pictured on the cover as part of the Israeli Army Entertainment Troupe. In this edition, it must be said, pictures – of the most wonderfully resonant variety – are a magnificent aid for commemorating an academic career and tenure at the Department that has left a mark on the spirit of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at UC. Prof. Sacha Stern, Dr Helen Beer and Dr Tali Loewenthal all share their thoughts on Prof. Rapoport-Albert in this edition (articles marked with an asterisk at left).

In addition to pieces elaborating on the Professor’s career, I am also extremely grateful for the contributions to this edition from Sara Benisaac, of the Institute of Jewish Studies, Charlotte Kirkham and Liz Gregory. Thanks also to Belinda Stojanovic, without whom my typos would no doubt be far more numerous.

Chag Purim Sameach and Freilichin Purim, to one and all!!

/David Dahlborn x
The Department was very fortunate to be awarded last year the largest grant ever raised in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, for a research project on ‘Calendars in Antiquity and the Middle Ages’. I promised in the last Newsletter to write something about this project, so here it is.

The full title of the project is ‘Calendars in Antiquity and the Middle Ages: standardization and fixation’. Its aim is to study the evolution of calendars in late antique and medieval societies, with a special focus on Roman, Christian, Jewish, and Islamic calendars. We are interested to discover how calendars in all these different traditions evolved, in late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, towards ever increasing standardization and fixation. The complex evolution of these calendars was closely related to politics, science, and religion, and contributed more widely to the standardization of culture in the ancient and medieval worlds.

The project was launched last year, and will go on until 2018. It is funded to the tune of no less than 2,500,000 Euros, by the ERC, i.e. ‘European Research Council’, the EU body that funds major research projects in universities across the whole of Europe. A team of five Research Associates together with me (as Principal Investigator) are working in several specific areas, including the seven-day week in the Roman Empire, late antique calendar tables, medieval Jewish calendar disputes, and medieval Arabic and Hebrew works on astronomy, chronology, and calendars. The team meets regularly to exchange ideas and insights. My colleagues are: François de Blois, Ilaria Bultrighini, Israel Sandman, Nadia Vidro, and Ilana Wartenberg – all experts in a variety of fields. And not to forget our project administrator: Georgia Panteli.

You can find out much more about the research project mentioned in this article by visiting our website, http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hebrew-jewish/research/research-pro/calendars-antiquity-middle-ages. Please have a look at it: the website is largely the work of Georgia, and it has some very nice illustrations. You will also find there the details of our last workshop, which was open to the public, and there are more workshops in planning.
All I wish to add, in the context of this Newsletter, is how inspiring and invigorating it is to work on a single project in such a large team. The model of team research was originally imported, I believe, from the Sciences.

When I first heard, in the early 2000s, that this model was being promoted in the Humanities, my initial instinct was to dismiss it as yet another government-led initiative that would do no good for our discipline. But although lone researchers have and will continue having an important place in the Humanities, I now recognize that team research can be very productive and exhilarating. It provides a unique opportunity to study in depth a range of research questions that are closely interrelated, but that no individual would ever have the time to tackle on his own and in a single life-time. Team work also creates a special buzz and synergy that lead to the formation of new ideas, new interpretations, and sometimes, on a good day, even new discoveries.

Since I started as Head of Department, I have been encouraging all members of staff to follow suit and apply for similar grants and research projects. I would love to see the proliferation of research teams in the Department. There are financial incentives in this, which I shall not deny: grants bring good money into the Department. But it is not just about money. Research teams inject new life into the Department, with new faces, new

Above, a calendar of antiquity. The Tel Fara Plaque.

Courtesy of UCL Institute of Archaeology
Researchers, and new activities. My hope is that these projects will also help to draw our students into our research life, as well as the wider public, and that they will promote understanding of how research contributes to knowledge and insight in all facets of Jewish Studies.

I cannot conclude this article without mentioning that one of the first in the Department who conceived and ran a team-led research project of this kind was our former Head of Department, Professor Ada Rapoport-Albert. Ada headed an AHRC-funded project in the mid 2000s, on the Aramaic of the Zohar. Last January, we celebrated her retirement with a party organized by our faithful administrators, Lia Kahn-Zajtmann and Belinda Stojanovic. This was a memorable occasion. Ada was presented with some amazing gifts and crafts (mainly the works of Belinda and some of our distinguished alumni and students), and the catering was also superb.

I mentioned in my speech that Ada has always treated the Department as her family, and for good reason, as she has been in the Department without interruption through all her studies and academic career. Accordingly, she relates to all of us, her colleagues in the Department, as either siblings, children, or grandchildren (depending on their age – you can work out which category I fall under…). But as I pointed out, the problem with families is that one can never retire from them. Ada has not really retired from the Department. We salute you, Ada, but we also look forward to seeing you around for many more years! ❘

“Accordingly, she relates to all of us, her colleagues in the Department, as either siblings, children, or grandchildren”
UCL's Institute of Jewish Studies ran a lively one-day conference, Vision 2020 - Leading British Jewry into the Future, with the Board of Deputies of British Jews, sponsored by the Jewish Chronicle, for 130 people in the Gustave Tuck lecture theatre on March 9. The conference focussed on how the community is to be led in a positive constructive way, inclusive of its many different sectors and their needs. Raymond Simonson, who has a BA from the Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies (1996) and now heads JW3 London's newest community centre, spoke passionately about being 'out loud and proud' of our Jewish identity and embracing all who want to be part of it. Jonathan Boyd, who spearheaded the recent National Jewish Community Survey, drew attention to the escalating movement towards non-religious 'cultural' Jewish identity vs the growth of the orthodox Charedi community. But he also pointed to the many new institutions being set up by and for young people despite the current challenges and the changing face of Jewish society. Joe Tarsh, President of the Union of Jewish Students, said that involvement in leadership needed to start at home and through education and more young people were showing their affiliation through youth work and going to Israel. Simon Morris of Jewish Care
thought that the Jewish community was 'ahead of the game' in dealing with issues affecting the rest of society, and Board President Vivian Wineman summed up the mood of the conference by saying we have the right and ability to stand up as proud Jews in Britain today.

Find out more:

Type this link into a web browser to view a short film of the conference at

www.youtube.com/watch?v=HYdOVZVAn8o

The conference was held in the Gustave Tuck Lecture Theatre at UCL.
Note the brand new IJS banner at left.
A Chapter in the cultural history of HJS at UCL

We all know that our small Department punches above its weight when it comes to artistic expression, but what about less well-known tales of past adventures in the world of showbiz?

By Dr Helen Beer

It is interesting to note how projects can evolve by chance, or simply in a moment of madness. Enshrined in the cultural history of our department is the annual Purim Shpil. For a decade, the HJS student-staff Purim Shpil followed the tradition of the Yiddish Purim Shpil which dates from around the 16th century. Mostly we adapted existing Purim Shpils, but latterly a series of newly-written ones were added. The delicious experimentation continues as this year for the second time, the Purim Shpil is (uncharacteristically) performed in Biblical Hebrew.

What is now a well-tried Purim tradition in our department was born of a brief moment at a departmental Channukah party many years ago. I happened to be standing next to Ada during the spirited singing of a Channukah song and found myself saying to her "Gosh, you have a great voice.... maybe we should put on a Purim Shpil next year". And so it came to pass.

Each year Ada would play the part of Vashti which almost always involved the singing of a song. Each year, the question would arise - which melody should we choose? On one occasion Vashti's strident lament was sung to the melody of a Bulgarian children's song which Ada had learned from her mother. I came to know that before embarking on an extraordinary academic career, Ada had participated in another life, one that might have led to quite a different career path.

All of this was largely unknown to me when in 2001, a brief conversation with a colleague in the HJS corridor planted the seed for a venture which surpassed any number of Purim Shpils in the scale of its ambition. A conference on

“Throughout my years in the Department, I have had the privilege of witnessing the array of hidden and not--so-hidden talents of our students and members of staff.”
Yiddish Theatre was being planned for the summer of 2002 and I was asked if we should invite some artists to perform an evening of Yiddish theatre and song. Inspired by the artistic potential of our Purim Shpils and by the heart-warming formula of creative student-staff ventures, I responded with "we don't need to import anything, we can create something ourselves".

Looking back, I cannot believe that we staged 'Jacob Jacobson', an extraordinary Yiddish play in 4 acts, written in 1930 by Aaron Zeitlin (1898-1973) in Warsaw and never previously performed. There were 3

performances held at the Bloomsbury Theatre, 25 acting roles, with the 1st Act taking place on the decks of a ship, the 2nd and 3rd Acts beneath the ocean and the final act in the Garden of Eden!

Ada played one of the major roles, that of Lucy Jacobson; a complex character and the opera singer wife of Jacob Jacobson. It is almost impossible to imagine (in today's university climate) how we all had time to combine studying, teaching, research and administrative tasks with rehearsals and
without compromising standards. I can still recall Ada squeezing in rehearsals between everything else that a busy academic needs to do. The acting, singing, memorising of lines in Yiddish were all undertaken by her with the ease of the truly professional actor/singer that she was.

As a young girl, Ada wrote plays and directed her young friends in their performance (in a pergola in the garden) before joining the Youth Theatre of Israel. Ada’s army service took place within the Army Entertainment Troupe; its members performed at the bases of all the armed forces. Entry into the Troupe was highly competitive and seen as a stepping stone to a career in show business. Members received training in various aspects of the dramatic arts. Interestingly, this Entertainment Troupe was modelled after ENSA (Entertainments National Service Association) which was established in 1939 to provide entertainment for British armed forces.
personnel during the Second World War.

Having been trained as an operatic dramatic soprano within the Troupe, Ada took part in reviews (skits and songs) and a purpose-created musical over a two-year period. Professional musicians were also involved and the Troupe mostly travelled everywhere by lorry; one for the performers and one for the sets. During this period, Ada thought that upon completion of her army service, she would study drama....

Throughout my years in the Department, I have had the privilege of witnessing the array of hidden and not--so-hidden talents of our students and members of staff. Here in particular, I salute our Ada as scholar, teacher - and artist. And to all of you who have hidden talents and private passions, keep them simmering. As you can see, everything is potentially useful. There are so many more rich and diverse stories which constitute the fascinating cultural history of our department. In the words of Robert Frost ('The Road Not Taken'):

"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference".
Though on Valentine's day I lay in bed and cried,
It was purely coincidence that I had no lover that day.
Rather, the pitter patter tears on my cheeks as on my window,
reflected an unfathomable crack, a break,
how is it?
O l'âme l'âme l'âme
So broken: heavenly porcelain don't splinter that way!
Someone, was it Waits?, said that cracks are good,
He said: they let the light shine through.
But people don't like cracks,
So frightening, the vulnerability of emotion.
It is easier to run or to ignore,
Joe, this is what he did,
O l'âme l'âme l'âme.

How can we believe in people when people do not believe in people any more?
They do not believe in themselves, in life, in humanity:
Forgiveness is rarer than diamonds.
And to forget?- My dear, you are already forgotten.
Sweet doll,
so many fractures,
thoughtless cruelty in abundance.
Hello? Hello? Is there anybody there?
There is if you want a party:
Look glam and you have a thousand friends,
But when she is bleeding in St Paneras,
where are they?
This station of life, of love, of travels, of adventure;
The loneliest place on earth.
When I am bleeding, or rather
my eyes let run what my heart cannot show,
Neither man either side me stirs from his newspaper,
No glance in my direction, no glance of humanity.
How many have been sat there before me?
How many have taken the other exit:
have climbed the station stairs, and kept on climbing?
O Liz, peel yourself from the steel benches!
O Liz, run outside!
I am quenched by the winter gale, the burning stars!,
London's toxic air and the werewolf's moon!
The world is very much alive tonight;
And so am I.
Ada is a dear friend to my wife and I, and our children, including of course her children Saul and Maya. This is a close bond not subject to any form of ‘retirement’. Nor indeed is her leading role in the world of Jewish Studies, particularly in the field of Hasidism, although her prowess and even publications go further. So these few words are just some brief personal fragments, fallen leaves.

I met her in my first year studying Jewish History and Hebrew Literature in our department, back in 1968. My first memory of her, or about her, is Professor Yossi Weiss, with whom we studied medieval texts, such as Iggeret Hashmad by Maimonides, and Gezerot Ashkenaz ve’Tzorfat, telling my class about her – “she is an actress!”

I think this really had to do with her Israeli Army service. Lately, of course, she has been able to fulfil such ambitions in Helen’s wonderful productions.

She was doing a PhD with Weiss on Rabbi Nachman of Braslav, particularly on the later generations – that’s how, as I
remember, it was intended. Visiting him frequently, I think. Long discussions. The kind of teacher-student relationship which people used to have, before Turnitin…

Then, tragically, Weiss passed away. We were both at the funeral. Ada had to switch supervisor, to Chimen Abramsky, who bravely stepped in and indeed she wrote a very interesting work on Succession in Hasidism, with special reference to Braslav.

I was also interested in Braslav; there was much to discuss.

She worked on editing: Jewish History essays in honour of Chimen Abramsky, together with Steve Zipperstein. That’s where she published her article ‘On Women in Hasidism’, criticizing Abba Horodecky’s presentation of the role of women in Hasidism. But Abba Horodecky had been a friend of her grandfather. She once said she felt – not guilty, but… something… sensitive…

She organised a Conference on Hasidism in 1988 – Hasidism Reappraised and the more recent
All photographs reproduced in this article are from Prof. Ada Rapoport-Albert’s Retirement Party, January 2014. Former students joined past and current colleagues, along with friends and family to wish Prof. Rapoport-Albert all the best in her retirement and to thank her for her outstanding contribution to the Department over the years. There was food, drink, speeches were made and Ada-words floated around the room. We had previously asked all those attending to send us a word that reminded them of Prof. Rapoport-Albert. These were then anonymously displayed on black pom-poms around the room and proved to be stimulating discussion points!
conference on the New History of Hasidism. Ada’s ability to join opposites together is remarkable. She can bring together people from disparate sides of the study of Hasidism, people who were highly critical of each other’s views and approaches, and in her aura the Conference works….

I must acknowledge her great personal help to me. When I wrote a paper for a conference I would show it to her. She helped me stand back from the material, to gain a semblance of an objective and critical view.

Her students to this day are aware of her critical pen, or pencil sometimes, writing copious notes on their essays, chapters of theses. For the seasoned academic scholars who submit papers to the books she has edited, there is a certain problem regarding authorship. As if all or most of the articles in the book should be Professor so-and-so and Ada.

But she can also be very forthright and powerful in defence of her students. There was a certain PhD, on what she and I thought was a fascinating subject. Two external examiners, both elderly, one of whom in particular was world famous. They came to the viva, very negative to the doctorate. ‘Synagogue politics’ was the way one of them characterized the topic. They were going to demand massive revisions, or even fail it. Then came one of those mysterious moments. Ada ‘spoke to them’ …. I did not hear what she said. A minute later, yes, wonderful, all that’s needed is the addition of a paragraph in fact you can write it now in long-hand, that’s it, passed…

She has other dimensions to her academic life – I see her in Israel, where she is the centre of a group of friends who love her and care for her, worry about her. Generously, she opened doors for me and for others in order to enter that circle. There too, she has been a good friend to figures like Professors Immanuel Etkes and Chava Turniansky, helping to edit books in their honour, with wonderful management and literary skills.

These two worlds, our department on the one hand and international scholarship on
the other, which at first seemed rather different, were drawn together at her parties at home and the conferences she organised. Perhaps partly because of her influence in many ways there is a greater sense now that HJS at UCL London is indeed part of the international scene of Jewish Studies.

Another very disparate world which she was able to embrace, and be embraced by, is the orthodox scholars of Hasidism outside the university. I remember bringing Rabbi Sholom Ber Levin, librarian of the Lubavitch Library in NY, to her home. He had recently edited a twelve volume (now 15) edition of the letters of Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak, the sixth Rebbe. Ada was one of the few people in the world who had read them, and they chatted together while I listened in.

This brings us back to our own department in which she was always prominent when headed by others such as the late John Klier, whom she fully supported, and then which she herself ran so ably and gracefully.

Her recent book on women in Shabbatianism is about women with prophetic and almost magic powers. Perhaps this is a little autobiographical…

Ada, with G-d’s help, may you go from strength to strength, in good health, with Refuah Shelemah and Kerovah, always increasing your positive effect on others, as individuals, loving and much loved by all, and also on the wide world of Jewish Studies in which you are such a central figure. □
During my time at Bezalel School of Art and Design, Israel, I was studying with an economist turned artist named Ram Ozeri. Since leaving Bezalel, Ram has gone on to found the world’s only festival celebrating Contemporary Jewish Art: The Jerusalem Biennial. I was invited to participate after Ram saw some of my Jerusalem sketches and asked if I had anything in the pipeline. Independently, I was planning a painting of Esther. I wanted to paint the moment where Esther approaches Ahasveros to ask him to dine in her chamber, the precursor to pleading for her people. This moment of high tension has been depicted in art history many times, notably in the V&A tapestries.

The platform of the Jerusalem Biennial is the perfect place to explore Jewish stories. Timed to coincide with the Sukkot Holidays the Biennial asks many questions about Contemporary Jewish Art. As the State of Israel has become more established it faces questions on the purpose of Contemporary Israeli Art, and more widely, Contemporary Jewish Art. Is there a way to create specifically Jewish art that

Above: Portrait of Willem, 10x10cm, each line is a human hair (no pencil), shown at the Barbican Library 2014.
remains separate from Judaica?

My painting measures roughly three by four feet. It is an oil on canvas piece which will take approximately six months to paint. I have three models on board for this project, from Lebanon, Romania and India. The third figure is of the angel, who appears to turn the pages of Ahasveros’ book, reminding him of Mordechai’s good service, appears again to protect Esther as she risks death in approaching the King and also appears in order to trip Haman in Esther’s chamber. As the Megillah is all about mystery and the hidden nature of things, the setting is dark and mysteries.

The preparatory sketches should form part of a group show on ‘Remembrance’ that I am taking part in Draw 14, 6-18 October 2014, Menier Gallery, London. The painting itself will be revealed in during the 2015 Biennial, Jerusalem.

A big thank you also to Dr. Willem Smelik, who kindly posed for me, a portrait based on the pencil sketch was selected and show at ‘Hand Drawn 14’, a group exhibition in association with the Society of Graphic Fine Art at the Barbican Library, January 2014. □
Curious to see more of Charlotte’s art, to find out more about this year’s Jerusalem Biennale or to view the tapestry referred to in the article?

– Just follow these links online:

http://jerusalembiennale.org/

http://charliekirks.lintal.co.uk/

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O127215/tapestry-unknown/

_Above, Charlotte’s portrait of Dr Willem Smelik on display at the Barbican Library._