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Cover Photo
'Menorah #7' Hanukkah Lamp by Peter Shire, 1986. Made from steel: painted; aluminum: anodized; chromium.

Part of the 'Masterpieces & Curiosities: Memphis Does Hanukkah' Collection at the Jewish Museum, New York.

Editorial Team:
Sonti Ramirez, Joel Greenbaum
Welcome Back!

I’m delighted to be taking over this column while serving as interim Head of Department. Professor Sacha Stern is on sabbatical this year, working on a book project before returning to begin another term as Head of HJS.

It has been an eventful year since the publication of our last newsletter, with a good deal of travel among Departmental staff. First of all, we are happy to welcome back Dr Seth Anziska from a year’s research leave at NYU. Seth’s presence in the Department was very much missed last year and it is great to have him here again.

We are also delighted to welcome a new Teaching Fellow to the Department, Dr Sima Beer (an HJS alumna herself), who is teaching Elementary Yiddish. Sima has been very much involved in Departmental activities over the years, notably her participation in Dr. Helen Beer’s world premiere production of Arn Tseytlin’s Yiddish play Jacob Jacobson, which was performed at the Bloomsbury Theatre in 2002.

We are also very lucky to have two excellent new Postgraduate Teaching Assistants, Paul Moore and Ben Whittle (in addition to Joseph Citron, who started in this role last year). Paul and Ben are teaching Aramaic and Ugaritic respectively. In addition, Paul is co-directing and Ben is starring in the upcoming HJS production of the first Hebrew version of a Shakespeare play, Isaac Salkinson’s ‘Ithiel the Cushite of Venice’ (which, incidentally, was itself inspired by Helen Beer’s production of Jacob Jacobson – see p. 17 for further details about the context of the Ithiel performance).

This year we also have the privilege of being joined by three new researchers – Dr Sonya Yampolskaya, who has arrived from St Petersburg and will be in the Department for two years working on a grammar of Maskilic (Enlightenment) Hebrew with me (as well as participating in our production of Ithiel!); Dr Hongmei Chen, who has come to us for the year from Nanjing Forestry University in China and specialises in Jewish American literature; and Dr Simo Muir, who will be arriving in the Department this January and will be conducting research on Jewish and Roma culture in Finland.

Finally, we are fortunate to have been joined by marketing consultant Amber Raney-Kincade, who is spending six months in the Department overhauling our website, improving our social media presence, publicising our UG and PG programmes to a wider audience, and finding many more creative and inventive ways of helping us tell the HJS story to the world.

We’re also delighted to welcome a new cohort of BA, MA, and PhD students to the Department, as well as two affiliate MA students from the Hebrew University. As is our annual tradition, staff and new students took an overnight trip to Cumberland Lodge in Windsor Great Park near the beginning of term. Some highlights of the trip included Dr Tsila Ratner’s showing of the film Zero Motivation, a humourous and insightful examination of the contemporary experiences of women in the Israeli army, and a thought-provoking joint lecture by Sonja Noll and Ben Whittle on different linguistic ways of looking at the Hebrew Bible.
This year we have a number of Departmental staff absences as well. Professor Willem Smelik is away in 2017–18, pursuing research on the mixed use of Hebrew and Aramaic in rabbinic literature as a Harry Starr Fellow at Harvard University. Dr François Guesnet has likewise spent the autumn in New England, as Visiting Brownstone Professor in Dartmouth College, New Hampshire. He will be returning around the time that this newsletter comes out, and we are very much looking forward to hearing about his Dartmouth adventures.

Additionally our Departmental Administrator Dr Georgia Panteli has just left for a year’s maternity leave. She will be greatly missed while she is away, but we look forward to receiving updates (and hopefully a visit from the newest member of the Departmental family) during that time. We are currently recruiting an administrator to cover Georgia’s post for the year and hope to welcome them to the Department in January.

It has been a busy year in terms of Departmental research as well. Just to give one example, Professor Mark Geller’s ERC project on Babylonian medicine was recently featured in an article in Der Spiegel. The Department has also recently become co-host, together with SSEES, to a new UCL Press series called Grammars of World and Minority Languages, which will include grammar volumes on Jewish languages such as Judeo-Arabic and Ladino.

Finally, the 2017/18 academic year marks an important anniversary for the Department. While Hebrew teaching and scholarship has had a presence at UCL since its earliest days (with the first professor of the subject, Hyman Hurwitz, taking up his post in 1828), it was not until 1967 that this was expanded to the fully-fledged Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies that we know today, including the establishment of a number of posts in Jewish history. In order to commemorate this special occasion, we are in the midst of organising a 50th anniversary celebration, which will take place on 7 February 2018. Alumni should already have received the initial ‘save the date’ announcement, and more detailed information about the event will follow shortly. We look forward to celebrating our 50th anniversary with you all!
2017 In Review

Florentina Badalanova Geller (HJS Honorary Research Associate) published a 1000-page book in Russian on The Folk Bible, published by the Moscow Academy of Sciences and Topoi Excellence Cluster, FU Berlin.

Hearty congratulations to Scarlett Young (HJS 2010–14), her husband Dan and daughter Ariella on the birth of their baby boy Lucien.

Dr Lily Kahn recently hosted a virtual taster session on Hebrew & Jewish Studies at UCL for prospective students.

The UCL HJS Department had a stall for the Postgraduate Open Day. Masters student Sonti Ramirez and PhD student Ben Whittle engaged with prospective students about courses available in the department.
Professor Daniel Sperber discusses the custom of Persian Jews relating to the kindling of Hanukkah lights.

We find three separate and distinct customs among Persian Jews in regard to the number of lights which are kindled each day of Hanukkah. Some light one lamp on the first day and add an additional one on each of the succeeding days, according to the common custom, following Bet Hillel in Shabbat 21b. Another requires the lighting of three each day with the addition of one on each succeeding day; and the third begins with eight and adds eight additional nights (2).

The last custom is extremely puzzling; I have found nothing like it elsewhere, nor have I discerned its reason and origin. However, in regard to the second custom, which requires that one begin with three lights, there are sources which may elucidate and explain its rationale.
A friend and former student of mine, Mr. Naftali Stern, wrote an interesting article on the history of the Shamash in Halakhic literature (3). He concludes that there are two types of Shamash. One is intended to light the Hanukkah candles or lamps (4), according to Rav’s view that one may not use one Hannukah light to kindle another (5) while the second serves as a source of permitted light, since "it is forbidden for us to use the Hannukah lights [for purposes] other [than] looking at them."

After examining the sources, he concluded that according to the Tur and the Shulhan Arukh (673) the two shamashim were used simultaneously – one for kindling the lights, and one to serve as a source of light. This explains the widespread use of Hanukkah menorahs with places for two additional candles, often raised above the level of the others, and often at opposite ends of the menorah. This positioning is not only for aesthetic reasons, but in accordance with the halakhic views mentioned above (6).

It seems therefore that this view came to be expressed in the second custom of the Jews of Persia; they would kindle three lights, one for the Mitzvah, one for the Shamash used to kindle the actual Hanukkah lights, and one for use as a source of light. To carry the point a little further: the appearance of two Shamshim may explain a custom found among the Jews of Libya, where an additional light was kindled in the synagogues, along with the Hanukkah lights and the Shamash. We may surmise that there was more concern about the private use of the Hanukkah lights in a public place than at home, where the extra light was not kindled.

UCL HIS alumnus Daniel Sperber is a British-born Israeli academic and rabbi. He is a professor of Talmud at Bar–Ilan University in Israel, and an expert in classical philology, history of Jewish customs, Jewish art history, Jewish education and Talmudic studies.


4 See Sefer Ravya, siman 843, p.576.

5 Shabbat 22a.

6 See Catalogue of the Jewish Museum – London, ed. R. D. Bar–nett, London, 1974, plate CCXI, nos. 251–252; plate LXXXVI, no.266; and plate LXXX, no.268 (with descriptions on pp.50 and 52), and Encyclopaedia Judaica, vol. 7, col. 1298, no.12; col. 1310, no.35; col. 1314, no.40, etc.

*(title photo)* Iranian Jewish Rabbi Younes Hamami Lalehzar reads prayers after lighting candles to mark Hanukkah, the festival of lights, at Abrishami synagogue in downtown Tehran on November 28, 2013.

*(above left)* An Iranian Jewish woman performs her prayers during Hanukkah

*(right)* entrance to Abrishami Synagogue, Tehran.
FP PHOTO/BEHRZUZ MEHR
Who Are The Keepers of the Past?

UCL HJS alumna Dr Sima Beeri reflects on her recent visit to the Sholem Asch Festival in Kutno, Poland.

Fate has joined us with the Polish people for good, and our wishes and hopes belong to both nations, to one road, to a common bright future’ – Sholem Asch, Haynt (Today), 1928.

I was invited in the autumn of 2017 to take part in a very special cultural event in the small Polish town of Kutno. Kutno is located 33 miles north of Lodz, roughly in the centre of Poland. The invitation came from David Mazover, the great-grandson of Sholem Asch (1880–1957), one of the most important Yiddish novelists, dramatists and essayists of his generation. The extended Asch family lived in Kutno; Sholem Asch was born there and spent his early youth there. He received a traditional Jewish education, and his parents, especially his mother Malka, hoped that he would become a rabbi. Asch himself had other aspirations: he left Kutno in pursuit of a literary career to which he devoted himself wholeheartedly and passionately.
Features

Kutno today honours him and his literary legacy with a biennial “Sholem Asch Festival”, funded by the municipality and organised by a dedicated team of staff from the local library and the high school. The whole town of Kutno is abuzz for one week in October with guest theatre performances, concerts and lectures. The local school children, from primary school on, take part in the festival by performing Sholem Asch short plays, Yiddish songs and dance performances at the local theatres, along with original short-story competitions with entries from Poland and abroad. The festival finale is always a Gala event, and this year’s included an exceptional operatic performance by the world-famous opera singer Aga Mikolaj.

I was invited by Halina Sankowska, one of the festival’s organisers and a high school English teacher, to present a Yiddish language and culture seminar and workshop to a group of high-school students chosen from several local schools. The idea was to teach Polish students about Yiddish language and culture, the language of Sholem Asch and his contemporaries, the language of daily life and an inspiration for his literary works. Introducing the younger generation to this vast Yiddish culture and giving them a taste of Yiddish was truly encouraging. I was astounded by their curiosity combined with their ability to learn the Yiddish alphabet. They managed to learn quickly how to form Hebrew letters and to write their names in Yiddish after only a two-hour workshop.

The festival organisers are always very generous with their time and effort to make David and his guests welcome, and this visit was no exception. Our little group consisted of a delightful couple from the Yiddish Book Centre in Amherst (USA), myself and David Mazower, our host and tour guide. David has taken part in this festival since its beginning in the mid 1990s and is always received as an honoured guest and guest speaker. This time we were invited to visit the local library by its director Magdalena Konczarek, one of the major organisers of the Sholem Asch festival; there Andrzej Olewnik, a librarian with a keen interest in local history, showed us some remarkable photographs and rare books.

We were also able to view a special showing of rare photographs taken during the deportation of 6,000 Kutno Jews into the Ghetto during WWII. They were taken by a German officer during the few days in mid June 1940 that it took to resettle the Jews to a neglected sugar factory on the outskirts of Kutno and donated many years later to an archive in Germany by his family. This photographic archive consists of some eighty images of astonishing clarity which document the unfolding historical events of Jewish life in Kutno, from the moment people vacated their homes to the long procession of carts and people walking into the ghetto. Andrzej and another young librarian, Jonasz Fryz, who also doubled as our translator, took recent photographs of the same places as those in the archive, and the result was a compelling historical document of the closing chapter of Kutno Jews.

Kutno is a small unremarkable town in Poland, but the people understand that their past Jewish history had a strong influence on its character and its way of life; the new generations are trying to remember and even to celebrate this common past. Poland youth today understands that this intertwined Jewish and Polish history needs to be researched and preserved, and they are rising to the challenge by learning about our history and preserving what remains of it.

Dr Sima Beeri is a UCL HJS alumna and currently teaches Yiddish in the department.
Between 'Mate' & Jewish Gauchos

UCL HJS Masters student Paola Khalili discusses the role of the Jewish Colonization Association in creating rural Jewish schools in Argentina from 1895 – 1920.

When I visited the rural colonies of Entre Ríos in North East Argentina in 2014, I was amazed at the wealth of elements representing a dual figure of Jewishness mixed with native Argentinian elements.

These colonies have become a focal point for tourism and genealogical research, although the local Jewish population is diminishing by the day. Some synagogues had been destroyed or used as stables, but a few remain functional. There are also a few museums with cluttered objects such as slaughtering knives and everyday objects with a Jewish twist.
However, what caught my attention was an educational book for children printed in 1949 explaining in Yiddish the Argentinean national symbols: the flag, the national drink ‘mate’, the national heroes Belgrano and San Martin, a Yiddish poem regarding the national anthem, stories about Jewish colonists and Jewish gauchos and a tale of a child visiting Buenos Aires for the first time. I wanted to examine the origin of this symbolism, the choice of elements and the role that education played in creating a new hybrid identity of the Argentinean Jew.

However, this question bears no simple answer. In 1895 rural schools were established in the colonies created by The Jewish Colonization Association (JCA) in Argentina. This organisation was founded by Baron Maurice de Hirsch in 1891 with the aim to help Jews from Eastern Europe to emigrate to agricultural colonies to many countries, being the largest project in Argentina. The JCA organized these colonies and were in charge to supervise their daily functioning, productivity and the wellbeing of the immigrants by providing basic medical and religious services as well as education. At the end of the XIX century, rural areas in Argentina were depleted of infrastructure, so the JCA had to provide school buildings and roads to access them, bring Jewish teachers from abroad, print books and create a curriculum.

The project was not simple and was a source of conflicts between teachers, colonists, JCA administration, and the Argentinean government – all well documented in the European Jewish press as well as in the Argentinean national press. Questions regarding language of instruction, attitudes toward Yiddish, choice of Argentinean symbols were just a few concerns. Argentina was at the beginning of the XX century shaping their own identity as an independent country from Spain with a third of its population been immigrants, so schools were the primary agent for forming a solid national identity. It would be fascinating to explore to what extent did the JCA understand and help form the national identity of the Argentinean Jewish communities.

Paola Khalili is a UCL HJS Masters student currently writing her dissertation on the Jewish Colonization Association in Argentina.
Exploring the Origins of Jewish Feminism

UCL HJS PhD student Ellery Weil discusses the rise of the Jewish feminist movement in the English-speaking world.

As the first term draws to a close, it’s impossible not to reflect on the beginning of my doctoral studies. Given the headlines in recent days, with the #MeToo movement a top contender for TIME Magazine’s Person of the Year, my research on the rise of Anglophone Jewish feminism feels especially relevant as we head towards 2018.

I have been studying the Jewish women’s movement in the early twentieth century in three Anglophone nations—Britain, the United States, and Australia. In looking at how the three movements developed differently in the three nations, despite similar Anglophone cultural roots and ties to the British Empire in all three countries, I have been exploring how national identity can shape a social movement.
So far, I have been looking into key concepts and individuals from each movement, as well as familiarizing myself with gender theory and historical sociology. One of the most interesting differences I have found so far is the wildly divergent relationship between Jewish feminism (Jewish women advocating for the rights of women in general) and feminist Judaism (Jewish women advocating for a more active and powerful role within the Jewish faith itself) in the three nations.

In Britain, Jewish feminism and feminist Judaism were nearly one and the same. For instance, Lily Montagu (see image), a passionate suffragette and activist, was also the founder of the more egalitarian Liberal Judaism. Meanwhile, in the United States, Jewish feminism and feminist Judaism had almost no contact with each other, and in Australia, the Jewish community before the war was almost entirely strict assimilationists.

These differences point to differences in each nation surrounding ideas of modernity, the role of religion in personal life, and views on assimilation. While it’s early days yet, my project has pointed to a wealth of material in a previously unexplored aspect of the early Jewish women’s movement. And in light of the questions the modern women’s movement finds itself faced with, including the role of minority women, my work feels more relevant than ever.

Ellery Weil is a first year UCL HJS PhD student.

(title photo): Members of the 'Women of the Wall' organization wear phylacteries as they pray at the Western Wall, Judaism’s holiest site, in Jerusalem on January 02, 2014. (Miriam Alster/FLASH90)

Left: Lily Montagu, a passionate suffragette and activist, was also the founder of the more egalitarian Liberal Judaism.
Luther and the Jews

UCL HJS alumnus Richard Harvey discusses his book on Martin Luther and Jewish-Christian relations.

I grew up in the UK, where the Protestant Reformation resulted in the formation of the Church of England, and where the Anglican Church, like the Lutheran Church around the world, combines elements of Catholic and Reformed tradition. When I became a believer in Jesus, my early years of discipleship were within a Protestant Evangelical context, so the works of Luther, his classic statements of the doctrines of justification by faith, the supremacy of scripture and the need for personal faith, were taught as fundamental to the life of a believer.

As a member of the London Messianic Congregation in the 1980s, I found that much of Messianic Jewish theology at the time was in reaction to anti-Jewish elements of Christian theology, particularly the arguments against Supersessionism; that the Church had replaced the Jewish
people to become the ‘new’ or ‘true’ Israel, and repudiated the ‘teaching of contempt’, that the Jews, because of their crime of deicide, deserved exile and continuing punishment because of their rejection of Jesus.

Initially I was introduced to the works of Luther through my theology studies. The book *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977) by EP Sanders questioned what he characterized as the “Lutheran reading of Paul”. I realized that this ‘new perspective’ was good news for Jewish believers in Jesus like myself, who often felt forced to choose between Torah and Messiah, and were accused of legalism and ‘going back under the law’ if we chose to be Torah-observant as Jesus-believing Jews.

However my encounter with Martin Luther brought into sharp focus the place of Luther in the tradition of Christian anti-Judaism and popular anti-semitism in a way that has challenged my own faith perspective, and my ability to forgive Luther and Lutherans for the sufferings brought about by him on my people.

I was staggered to read the constant litany of abuse, insult, hatred and hostility against Jews and Judaism that featured in Luthers writings. His vicious mixing of racial and religious hatred claimed to be based on Scripture and the teaching of Christ and the Apostles, yet his murderous threats and poisonous libels against the Jewish people are probably the worst examples ever of Christian anti-Judaism. He mocked Jewish respect for the sacred name of God and argued that the Talmud ‘came out of a pig’s anus’ (Stjerna & Schramm 2012). It’s no wonder that his works were praised and republished by the Nazis, who claimed he would be proud of their actions on Kristallnacht (1939) and appealed to him for justification of their actions in their defense at Nuremberg (1945). Luther argued that Jews should be thrown out of Germany, their property confiscated, their books burnt, their synagogues destroyed, and they should be given no safety. He backed up his inflammatory language with repeated attempts to persuade German leaders to carry out this program. His theological anti-Judaism and social and political anti-Semitism cannot be disentangled or excused.

For five years now, Luther’s writings and impact on the Jewish people have burdened me. I have visited Wittenberg three times to protest at the continued offence of the Judensau (Jew-Pig) sculpture on the wall of the Stadtkirche where Luther preached. I am also writing two books, Luther and the Jews: Putting Right the Lies and Luther and the Messianic Jews: Strange Theological Bedfellows. One is at a popular level addressing the impact of Luther’s legacy of Christian anti-Judaism that influenced the anti-Semitic genocidal program of the National Socialists culminating in the Holocaust.

The other brings Lutheran and Messianic Jewish scholars together to engage with each other’s differing theological views and traditions.

There are two commonly believed myths about Luther’s views on the Jewish people, neither of which are correct but in some way are used to justify – in my opinion – Luther’s inexcusable attitudes to Jews. The first is that Luther started off his ministry with a positive attitude to the Jewish people, believing that they would, if treated considerately, become true believers in Jesus and aid him in his struggles against the Roman Catholic church. The second is that Luther, for all his anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism, finally repented of these sins on his deathbed. Whilst it is correct that Luther’s early works, especially ‘That Jesus Christ was born a Jew’ have some positive statements about how Jews should be treated, his earliest writings such as his lectures on the Psalms and on Genesis Luther used an anti-Jewish polemic that he inherited as an Augustinian monk. Augustine of Canterbury believed that the Jews were condemned to be ‘reluctant witnesses’ of the truth of Christianity by their rejection of Jesus and consequent sentence and punishment to be a ‘wandering people’ within Christendom. As for the imagined death-bed repentance, Luther did confess his sins but his hatred of the Jewish people persisted right up to the time of his final sermons a few days before he died. In his imagination it was the Jews who were attacking him and trying to kill him, and against whom in his final public sermons and private words to his wife he gave admonitions and vitriolic condemnations.

There are still strains of theological anti-Judaism and popular anti-Semitism running throughout Luther’s works. ‘On the Jews and their Lies’ is a 65,000-word tirade against the Jewish people and their interpretation of scripture, particularly their interpretation of the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, which Luther attempts to show have been fulfilled in the coming of Christ. For Luther, the continuing exile of the Jewish people from their land for the past 1500 years is a further proof of the condemnation and judgment of God upon them.

From a messianic Jewish perspective, I am able to recognize and appreciate Luthers contribution to the development of the Reformation and evolution of the modern world. He introduced the Bible into a vernacular language, he was willing to stand up against the abuses and evils of the Church of his day and his influence on the modern nation state and mainstream Christianity.
But Luther’s anti-Judaism cannot and should not be separated from later anti-Semitism that culminated in the Holocaust, the genocidal murder of 6 million of my people, and 6 million others (Communists, Homosexuals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, the disabled and mentally ill, travellers and others). My people still suffer from a multi-generational post-traumatic stress that has equally unfortunate and unintended consequences such as the victimized becoming the victimizer, particularly in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – another tortuous and complex subject.

So reconciliation, first between German Christians and Messianic Jews, and then more widely between Jews and Lutherans, is greatly needed. Sadly I have observed little of this, and find that many Lutherans just do not understand how Jewish people and Jewish believers in Jesus feel. This grieves me greatly, as I would like my family, most of who do not believe in Jesus, to hear genuinely good news from Lutherans, or at least an expression of regret, a note of apology, and a willingness to do something to put matters right.

Dr. Richard Harvey is Senior Researcher for Jews for Jesus and Associate Lecturer at All Nations Christian College. This article is his personal view and does not represent the views of any other individual or organization. Harvey is an alumnus of the UCL Hebrew & Jewish Department (MA Hebrew & Jewish Studies 1989 – 92).
What is the title of the book?

LK: In short, the book is called ‘The First Hebrew Shakespeare Translations’. But the title also gives credit to the author of the Hebrew translations: ‘Isaac Edward Salkinson’s Ithiel the Cushite of Venice & Ram and Jael’. The book is ‘a bilingual edition & commentary’, which is also factored into the title. It wasn’t supposed to be so long, but then I realised that we needed the names of the actual plays, which made it longer, and then we needed something about the fact that it is a bilingual edition and commentary, and then The First Hebrew Shakespeare Translations.

Was the original intention purely translation? Or simply to publish the plays?

LK: My original plan was, first of all, to make these plays better known. I wanted to do a new edition of them with the commentary on the sources they were using. Then, I thought that it would be interesting to see them juxtaposed with the Shakespearean originals, with the Hebrew on one side and English on the other side. That was the original plan, and the commentary would explain noteworthy points in the Hebrew.

Then at some point, it became clear that if someone didn’t understand Hebrew, then they would want to understand the Hebrew plays. So in a perfect world, there would be three columns: Shakespearean original, Hebrew text and the back-translation of the Hebrew on the other side. But this would have made the book 2000 pages long!!!

So finally, I decided that it is easy enough to get a copy of the Shakespearean original, but in order to make it accessible for people interested...
"I then became curious to find out when Shakespeare had first been translated into Hebrew, and I found out about these 19th century translations"

in translation studies, global Shakespeare or minority literature in Europe who don’t know Hebrew then it would not be helpful just to have the Shakespeare and the Hebrew as they wouldn’t know what was going on in the Hebrew. So fortunately, I ended up at the final configuration, which was having the Hebrew on one side and the English back-translation of the Hebrew on the other side.

**How and when did your interest in Hebrew Shakespeare come about?**

LK: It was during the year of the 2012 Olympics in London. As part of the festivities, there was a large cultural programme, and the Globe Theatre was running a series called Globe to Globe which was all 37 plays done in 37 different languages. Well, I say different languages – there were plays done in different Spanish dialects, and even one performed in ‘hip-hop’, which is not actually considered to be a language as such!

I received an advert for the Hebrew production of The Merchant of Venice that was sent to the Department, performed by the Habima theatre company (the national theatre company of Israel). At the time, I wasn’t really interested in Shakespeare at all, but whilst booking I saw the variety of languages and plays on offer – there was one in Maori, and another in Yoruba – and I wanted to see these plays. So I booked a few them, and at the first one (in Maori), I was totally captivated and wanted to book more! At that point, I started reading the synopses to understand what the plays were about. So even if you don’t understand the dialogue in another language, you can still follow the story through the use of scene summaries (e.g. ‘the king is angry’). Then I started reading the stories and was captivated by them.

I then became curious to find out when Shakespeare had first been translated into Hebrew, and I found out about these 19th century translations. 19th century Eastern European Hebrew is my research area – I find their translations interesting due to their domesticating/Judaizing approach which they use, omitting the Christian & mythological references and the Biblical citations. This was in line with topics I had worked on before.
Can you tell us about who Isaac Edward Salkinson was, and when he started doing these translations?

LK: He’s a really interesting character. He was born in 1820 near Shklov in present-day Belarus. He was a Lithuanian Jew with a traditional Cheder and Yeshiva background. Then he got interested in the Haskalah, started studying Hebrew grammar and Maskilic Hebrew literature. He also started studying German language and literature. He ended up on a boat to London (it is not clear of his intentions – according to one account he wanted to go to university in Berlin, and according to another he wanted to go to New York to receive rabbinical training), where he was met by the London Missionary Society. They (among other things) specialised in converting Jews in London to Christianity. This is where his story took an unexpected turn, given his typical Eastern European Jewish Maskilic background.

He converted to Christianity, remained in Britain and trained to be a Presbyterian minister in Scotland. He became fluent in English, and lived in Britain for around 15 years. When he became ordained, he was posted by the Society for the Propogation of the Gospel among the Jews to go to central Europe to work as a missionary. They also hired him to translate the New Testament into Hebrew. Literary translation had been a keen interest of his for a long time. He is also said to have translated a Schiller play into Hebrew in his earlier years (now lost), and he translated Paradise Lost into Hebrew as well (among other literary translations).

They sent him to Vienna, where he met Peretz Smolenskin, who was a major Maskilic Hebrew literary figure at the time. He was from Czarist Russia, as were most of the Maskilic Hebrew authors at the time. He met Salkinson in Vienna, and he had a dream to see Shakespeare translated into Hebrew, but couldn’t do it himself. Until then, only a few fragmentary translations had been done, but they had all been done from German, and no complete Shakespeare plays. Smolenskin saw Salkinson as an opportunity, as Salkinson was already fluent in English and a literary translator interested in Hebrew literature. Then the first translation, Ithiel the Cushite of Venice, came out in 1874.

It was very well received in the Hebrew press, but the author was anonymous (only his initials were published). Then Salkinson’s status as a missionary became better known and it was something of a scandal. The translation itself was appreciated, but given Salkinson’s background, the Hebrew press were reluctant to endorse it. But Smolenskin stood by him, so Salkinson carried on and translated Romeo and Juliet (Ram and Jael), released in 1878. Again, the critics liked it but would have preferred a more conventional Maskilic writer to be translating such plays, so were ambivalent. Salkinson is believed to have subsequently been reported to the Church authorities for neglecting his missionary duties and ‘wasting the Church’s money’ in translating these Shakespeare texts into Hebrew.

"Peretz Smolenskin... met Salkinson in Vienna, and he had a dream to see Shakespeare translated into Hebrew"
Interview

He wrote letters to the Missionary Society reporting on his activities, and he made a point that he was translating Shakespeare in his own time. However, his missionary work seems to have been somewhat minimal (e.g. he attended a Mishna Shiur and in the break, he tried to engage with the audience about the Church). He still identified as Jewish, and still wanted to be involved in Maskilic Hebrew literature, so his missionary work was kept separate from these activities. According to one source he was suspended from the Church following publication of Ram and Jael, and was not allowed to return until he finished his New Testament translation, which he worked on until he died in 1883.

Were there any other similar authors who adapted famous literature into Hebrew?

LK: There were lots of translations in that period. One of the most famous Maskilic translations was ‘Les Mystères de Paris’ (Eugène Sue), translated by Kalman Schulman. Schulman also translated the works of Flavius Josephus into Hebrew, so the practice of translating into Hebrew was already extremely widespread, as there was an idea of enriching the Hebrew literary canon, to put it on the level of German and French literature as a world literature with the same classics. But Salkinson was the first to translate Shakespeare into Hebrew, and within 20 years of his death, 4 more translations of complete Shakespeare plays into Hebrew were published. So Salkinson was the direct catalyst for Shakespeare translations, but was by no means the only author of Hebrew adaptations of classic literature.

Was there a motive for creating a new Hebrew culture? What motifs/themes did you come across?

LK: In the case of these translations, they are relatively close to the original language but are not completely literally translated (partly due to the largely biblicising nature of the Hebrew language that Salkinson used). All lines and characters are retained, but the names of the characters are changed. However, the Christian and classical references are replaced with Jewish references. For example, Easter becomes יָיִן (Passover). So you do get a very different feel, as the translation is not only Hebrew but very Jewish too!

Have you done or have you considered writing your own Hebrew adaptations of classical literature?

LK: Maybe into Ugaritic! I think it would be cool to have an Ancient Languages collection of Shakespeare! As far as I’m aware, there are no translations of Shakespeare into any other non-vernacular language apart from Salkinson’s translations into Hebrew, not even into Latin or Ancient Greek. The idea of Shakespeare into Akkadian or Ugaritic would be cool, but I don’t think it would be possible as Ugaritic does not have a huge amount of relevant vocabulary or a giant textual repertoire. Maybe a fragment, though!
Interview

What was the process of translating? Did you do it yourself?

LK: I did it myself, but my dog Panda kept me company!
I would translate, but would then have to check every line to see if it came from a Hebrew source, especially if it was something which was not particularly well-known. If it did, I would check the King James Version or the JPS and several others to see how it was translated. If it was a recognised phrase (e.g. ‘am I my brother’s keeper?’), then I would use that translation as the back-translation would give a feel of the Hebrew. Normally, I went for the KJV as it is often the best-known English Bible version.

Can you elaborate on the Shakespeare conference you organised?

LK: The conference was titled ‘Shakespeare and the Jews’. There aren’t actually many working on Hebrew Shakespeare, but 2 people did present on Salkinson which was exciting, and others presented more recent Hebrew translations of Shakespeare. Other topics include ‘different aspects of the character of Shylock’ and historical topics like ‘Jews in Elizabethan England’. There was also a panel on Shakespeare in Jewish education, which included a talk on teaching Shakespeare to medical students at the Hebrew University. The conference was quite representative of the different angles that people might research with relation to Shakespeare and the Jews, but was only partly on Hebrew.

Finally, what’s the plan for the future? Are there any more books or conferences in the pipeline?

LK: Last spring we enjoyed our performance of Ram and Jael last spring so much that this year we decided to perform the other Salkinson play, Ithiel the Cushite of Venice. The performance will take place June 19 and 20 in UCL’s Bloomsbury Studio theatre. After that, the next Shakespeare-related project I would like to do is to look at some of the state-sponsored Yiddish translations done in the Soviet Union in the 1930s. They are completely different to the Salkinson plays, but also very interesting.

"Dartmouth?
It's A Cult!"

Reflections from Dr. François Guesnet's time as Visiting Brownstone Professor at Dartmouth College.

Take a break from Brexit Britain to teach at a posh Ivy League College for one term – what is not to like about the idea? Perhaps that you temporarily move from a country in suicide mode to a country with a president who unfortunately is not suicidal. Apart from these macro-level considerations, the invitation to teach two courses at Dartmouth College as Visiting Brownstone Professor in Jewish Studies was too tempting, and I spent the fall term (roughly September through November) in Hanover, New Hampshire.

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Dartmouth is an undergraduate college not far from the middle of nowhere, and has chosen its motto accordingly: Vox clamantis in deserto (A voice calling in the wilderness). Even a short hike along the Appalachian Trail, the famous hiking trail passing through Hanover, gives you a good impression what it must have been like to be around in the area in 1769, when Dartmouth was founded as a missionary and educational institute: lots of trees, few libraries. This has obviously changed, Dartmouth has a very fine library with the added attraction to be connected to the Borrow direct library exchange system, allowing staff and students to order books from all member libraries, all leading academic libraries on the American east coast. This means you can order more or less any book you can think of and have it delivered in two or three days, as this system includes the libraries of Harvard and Yale, Columbia, Cornell, Brown etc.
Dartmouth does not have a Jewish Studies Department, but a highly successful Jewish Studies programme, with Prof Susannah Heschel as its director. Between a quarter and a third of all students at the college take at least one class with the programme. It was interesting for me to work with students who are studying economy, political science, geography or law. Many students knock on your office door in case they missed a class, they are quick and eager readers and ambitious. Each course has three weekly meetings of a bit more than an hour, which means that one gets to meet students quite a lot. The electronic teaching platform, Canvas, seemed more efficient than our clunky Moodle, especially as it allows to integrate most tasks more intuitively. Also, it includes a comprehensive administration of student assignments, making Turnitin superfluous. Most importantly, Dartmouth does not have second marking and no external examiners. I felt a bit like the Emperor of China, giving marks just like that.

As all Ivy League institutions, Dartmouth is highly selective. The strong sense of belonging is obvious on many levels, starting with the typical wearing of clothing with the college name or symbols, to the strength of the connection between institution and alumni. As one colleague with a personal history of Ivy League institutions said: 'Dartmouth is a cult.' The Homecoming 2017 celebrations in October came almost like an illustration of this statement. The ceremony of the main public event involved praise to distinguished and deserving staff, students, and alumni as well as to the various college sport teams and culminated in the lighting of a gigantic fire, a huge pyre the flames of which easily reached 30 m, with the freshmen (yes, they are all called freshmen, I felt oddly progressive to use the British term 'freshers,' completely unknown in the US) running in circles around the flames.
As students commented in class the next day, this year's freshmen managed only 121 rounds, which seemingly was a rather miserable result. I was just happy that none of them got sacrificed in the flames. Another rather impressive reflection of this attachment of the alumni to the College is the material support offered by these former students. In the past year alone, Dartmouth alumni raised more than two hundred and fifty million US dollars. I must have missed the report about the result of the first year of UCL's fund-raising efforts, but I assume we're not there yet. Perhaps next year. With six weekly meetings of my courses I was actually quite busy, and took the intense teaching week as a good excuse not to travel too much, and instead enjoyed the local offer in organic produce to be purchased on a weekly College market. For the first time in my life, I had the impression that London with its Farmers' Markets is cheap. Well, it isn't, really, but that's what you think when you pay $4.50 for a small offering of radish.

I went however to New York City to see an absolutely fascinating exhibition with new works by Kara Walker, who has exhibited already a couple of times in London, including in the Camden Arts Center, and whose drawings and collages reflect the bitter history and presence of racial exclusion in the US. A different take on this topic was a great book by Michael Twitty, The Cooking Gene, about the mixed culinary traditions of Europeans and African Americans in the southern States of the US going back to the history of slavery. The author discusses the role of genetic analysis to reconstruct family histories which have been obscured by the lack of written records, so typical of processes of forced labor, slavery, and deportation.
Also, I had the pleasure to co-host a conference at the University of Maryland, together with Rachel Manekin and Bernard Cooperman, about 'The Practice of Jewish Politics, 1492–1880', with an amazing line-up of speakers and great presentation - to discuss these in sufficient detail would however require another article. I spoke about the role of Jewish intercession and the end to torture in Poland-Lithuania in 1776, a fascinating episode in the history of Jewish intercession.

The final trip I undertook was to Miami, Florida. There, I visited a friend from childhood days who is principal of the George Washington Carver Middle School. This is a state school which well-known for its international programme, with a focus on language instruction: French, Spanish, German, and Italian are taught there to 6-8 graders. I was invited to teach one German and one French lesson, and two history lessons... and I was very much impressed by the level these kids had in foreign languages.

In hindsight, a quite remarkable term. While I did not miss second-marking, Brexit, and committee meetings, I did miss London and the Department, and look forward to be back soon. And to our big event celebrating the 50th anniversary of our Department. Perhaps we should have a big big fire in the main quad, and have the students run around it? Considering the positive impact on alumni commitment, perhaps we should think about it......
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