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Annoucements
When looking ahead to the academic year 2017/18 early in 2017, we realised that there were two anniversaries coming up - the 50 years of the establishment of the Department, but also the 10 years since the passing of our former colleague and Head of Department, the unforgettable John Klier. We are very grateful indeed to the Klier family to have agreed to honor the memory of John, this exceptional colleague and friend, taken from us too early, on the day we celebrate the 50 years of our Department.

John D. Klier was appointed as Sidney and Elizabeth Corob Lecturer in 1990, became a reader in 1993 and assumed the rank of Professor in 1996, fulfilling the role of Head of Department for much of the 1990s. Many from among us will have our own memories of time spent with John - in my case, these pertain mostly to a year as co-fellows at the Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia in 2002-03 - John was then working on his monograph on the pogrom crisis of 1881-82 – about which later –, as well as gathering the documentation for an important review essay about Aleksander Solchenitsyn’s assessment of Jewish-Russian cohabitation, ‘200 years together’.

John Klier was among the most productive and inspiring experts on Russian-Jewish history between the partitions of Poland and the First World War. His first book ‘Russia Gathers her Jews. The Origins of the ‘Jewish Question in Russia, 1772-1825’ was a careful reconstruction of how an absolutist state grappled with the unexpected bounty of several hundred thousand Jews acquired through the partitions of Poland. Published in 1986, it was translated in an much extended version into Russian in 2000.

In his next monograph ‘Imperial Russia’s Jewish Question, 1855-1881 (1995)’. John pursued this overall perspective to analyse how the status of the Jews of Russia became a core issue of Russian constitutional reform and political debate as well as mobilisation. Both of these monographs are unsurpassed analyses of the – mostly failed – attempts by an authoritarian state to define solutions for problems it had itself created, unable to moderate the ensuing social unrest and political confrontation.

A few thoughts on John Klier’s legacy on the occasion of 10 years since his passing, and the 50th anniversary of the UCL Hebrew and Jewish Studies Department.

‘Which Kind of Jewish Studies?’

The Legacy of John Klier

By François Guesnet
During these years, John Klier also was a dedicated editor of Soviet Jewish Affairs, a journal dedicated to the situation of Jews in the Soviet Union, a journal which was renamed East European Jewish Affairs after the demise of the Soviet Union, and today remains among the leading journals in this subfield of Jewish history.

Much of John’s historical research since the 1980s focused on one dimension of the political and social mobilisation against the hundreds of thousands of Jews living in Imperial Russia, namely anti-Jewish violence. Through his own painstaking archival research, John had emerged as one of the internationally leading experts on this phenomenon, leading first to large number of articles and a first book publication, the pioneering volume Pogroms: Anti-Jewish violence in modern Jewish history, co-edited with Shlomo Lambroza. In an ongoing debate with the small number of eastern Europeanists around the world engaged in research on this matter (Jonathan Frankel, Hans Rogger, Michael Aronson), John hoped to develop his own synthesis of the Russian pogrom crisis of 1881-82, a watershed in modern Jewish history.

The revision John Klier proposed to the dominant narrative developed not in the least by such towering authorities of Jewish and eastern European Jewish history such as Simon Dubnow or Salo W. Baron, about the involvement of the Tsarist government and administration, required a bottom-up analysis of events on the ground to understand this case of inter-ethnic riots. It also required a new methodological approach, and a re-assessment of antisemitism in Eastern Europe, which John complemented by the notion of Judeophobia, to disentangle two ideological trends at work in 19th c. Imperial Russia (I).

Many years of meticulous research lead to a manuscript which John would unfortunately not see published, due his illness which took his life just over ten years ago, on Sept 23, 2007. Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881-82 was published posthumously by Cambridge University Press in 2011 and has set the standard for any inquiry into anti-Jewish violence in eastern Europe – and beyond, I should say.

"For most of those who knew John, his legacy is one of a superb historian who was also a great friend, a loyal colleague and a dedicated Head of Department..."
John Klier’s exceptional standing is reflected also in the publication of books, the dedication of articles, and academic events dedicated to his memory. Thus, the network of Jewish Studies in the Russian Federation, Sefer, dedicated the published proceedings of its conference to John, under the title Problemy ebrejskoj istorii - ‘Questions in Jewish History’ in 2008, and a conference at the University of Urbana-Champaign was held in his honour, and led to the publication of a volume ‘Jews in East European Borderlands: Essays in Honour of John D. Klier’, in 2012 (edited by Harriet Murav and Eugene Avrutin). The seminal volume co-edited with Shlomo Lambroza on pogroms which I mentioned earlier was published in Russian translation as recently as 2016, reflecting the enduring contribution John Klier made to this important field of inquiry.

For most of those who knew John, his legacy is one of a superb historian who was also a great friend, a loyal colleague and a dedicated Head of Department. When we reflect on 50 years of the UCL Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies, I would like to mention one quality which made John special. As an expert in Russian history, and working mostly on Russian administrative source material, he very actively sought the exchange with his colleagues who looked at the history of the Jews from the perspective of the long trajectory of diasporic Jewish history. The dedication of his monograph about the pogrom crisis of 1881-82 to Jonathan Frankel, the foremost specialist of internal Jewish politics in Imperial Russia and a long-term friend of John’s with whom he had many substantial scholarly exchanges, is testimony to this.

This is also how he conceived of the role of a Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies - not a Department where everyone comes with the same identical skill set, but where people with a range of disciplinary qualifications would contribute to a debate about Jewish history and civilisation understood in its broadest terms.

At a workshop on the situation of Jewish Studies in Europe organised by the Rothschild Foundation Hanadiv Europe in Jerusalem in January this year, the senior programme officer cited from a letter of John of 2001. Drafted at the request of the Foundation in the context of the establishment of its academic programme, John set out his vision of the field in the following way:

“The underlying problem remains the extraordinary (I will refrain from using the problematic term "unique") range of subjects covered by the term “Jewish Studies”, due to the existence of “Jews,” and their variegated cultures across time. The ability of the Jews to maintain a specific identity while acculturating with many different societies means that "Jewish Studies" can incorporate the most diverse disciplinary approaches, while requiring an unusually broad core of basic knowledge as well as specific areas of expertise (often in the linguistic area.) [...] It would not be an exaggeration to describe "Jewish Studies" as the study of the phenomenon of the Jewish involvement with civilisation in general, if not a specific "Jewish Civilisation"” (2)

It is surely such an aggregation of “the most diverse disciplinary approaches,” as John put it, which characterises our Department. This leads to a sometimes surprising juxtaposition of topics in our research or graduate seminars - their topics seem completely unrelated, and reflect these ‘most diverse approaches.’ One can compare Jewish Studies to area studies, and at UCL, the School for Slavonic and Eastern European Studies, albeit much bigger than us, have a similar spread of disciplines as we do. This does not mean that we are unable to develop an appropriate form of organising these disciplines to start a conversation - best reflected in our two degree programmes which offer undergraduate and graduate students carefully balanced insights into Jewish history, languages, literatures, and thought. There is only a quite small number of university departments which go at these lengths to offer a comprehensive disciplinary reflection - and I hasten to add that this is not the only way to do Jewish Studies in an academically satisfactory manner. Speaking of my area of expertise, Jewish history would be as at home in a History Department as it is in a Jewish Studies Department. Looking back at years in the UCL HJS Department, I can however say that it undoubtedly provided me with a rich and fascinating scholarly context to pursue my own research. Because of the amazing depth and complexity of Jewish civilisation, the attempt to organise research into this legacy is an incredibly ambitious undertaking. Few universities take up this challenge, and we are extremely fortunate to have the sort of institutional framework we have at UCL. I personally believe it is very fitting for a university which considers itself London’s ‘global university’ to provide this framework for rigorous research, ambitious teaching and careful supervision.

(1) My take on the historical assessment of 19th c. anti-Jewish violence will be published shortly in the proceedings of a research project conducted at the University of Warsaw.

(2) Quote provided by Robin Nabel (RFHE), e-mail 6 February 2018 to the author.
I am going to start by making a confession – when I was younger, I used to hate Purim. The fancy dress, the inebriation, the noise; I despised it all. I was just too serious to enjoy a festival which essentially did not have a single element of seriousness in it. So you can imagine my horror when I heard the following statement: unlike other festivals, Purim will continue to be observed after the coming of the Messiah. But as I have got older, Purim has begun to resonate with me more. Now, I actually look forward to Purim more than most other festivals, and horror at the above statement turned into anticipation.

The Status Quo.

By Joel Greenbaum

But I don’t want to focus on my former animosity towards Purim. I want to focus on the statement I heard when I was younger, and what it means to me now.
It’s one of those things that, growing up religious, your parents tell you to make you enjoy the festivals, but over the years, I never took it upon myself to find out where this statement came from. Surely there is a source for such a profound hypothesis? So now that Purim has become somewhat more tolerable for me, I would like to delve deeper into the permanence of this felicitous festival.
“And these days shall be celebrated in every family, in every country, in every city. And these days of Purim shall never pass out from their memory depart from their descendants.”

(ESTHER 9:28)
It turns out, this idea comes straight from Megillat Esther, the story we read on Purim:

“And these days shall be remembered and celebrated in every generation, in every family, in every country and in every city. And these days of Purim shall never pass out from among the Jews, nor shall their memory depart from their descendants”

(Esther 9:28)

Commenting on this verse, Rashi says that “these days shall be remembered” by reading the Megillah, and “celebrated” with feast, delicacies, gifts and gladness. Here, Rashi covers all bases by touching on all four major Mitzvot (commandments) of Purim in his commentary: reading the Megillah, Mishteh (having a feast), Matanot Le’Evyonim (giving to the poor) and Mishloach Manot (giving packages of delicacies).

With this in mind, maybe I should elaborate more on the statement hypothesis presented to me at a young age. So instead of “unlike other festivals, Purim will continue to be observed after the coming of the Messiah”, perhaps the statement should read “unlike other festivals, Purim will continue to be observed after the coming of the Messiah in exactly the same way”. From Rashi’s commentary, we can gather that Purim will not only continue to be celebrated in the Messianic Era, but the coming of the Messiah will have absolutely no impact on the nature of the festivities at all. This is not so concerning other days of the Jewish calendar. For example, Tisha B’Av, which commemorates the destruction of the Jewish Temples, is a day of mourning and remembrance, but after the coming of the Messiah, who according to tradition will be born on Tisha B’Av, this day will become a day of celebration and salvation.

In short, the nature of days like Tisha B’Av will change in the Messianic Age, but Purim will remain constant.

The verse goes on to say that Purim should be celebrated “in every generation, in every family, in every country and in every city”. Ibn Ezra interprets this to mean that no Jew is exempt from celebrating Purim, since no-one could claim to reside in a country which was either non-existent or one which had no Jews at the time of the Purim story. Therefore, if every single Jew undertakes the obligation to celebrate Purim, we can ensure that “these days of Purim shall never pass out from among the Jews”.

The Midrash states that ‘even if all the festivals should be annulled, Purim will never be annulled’, further underpinning the idea the status quo of Purim shall be maintained for all eternity. There is always something to celebrate in the department, whether it is the achievements of its wonderful students (of which I am one) or its recent 50th anniversary. What’s more, with UCL Hebrew & Jewish Studies being such a close-knit band of students and staff, these celebrations are all the more meaningful and special. And there’s no better time to celebrate than on Purim!

With this in mind, I wish you all a Purim Sameach!
Illustration: Soni Ramirez
2017 was an eventful year – In November, I was invited to join the Balfour Centenary celebrations in Westminster. The day was quite memorable for two reasons – in the morning Turkish hackers decided they were going to stage their own commemoration service by hacking several major Jewish media channels including the Times of Israel with posters of Al Aqsa Martyrs. I also found myself listening to what was to be the final speech of Secretary of state for International Development Priti Patel. After so eloquently speaking about the relevance of the Declaration, Patel went onto to resign 8 days later over a scandal involving secret summer liaisons with Israeli officials. However it was interesting to discover the impact of the Balfour Declaration in other countries around the world, particularly in the Commonwealth. The UK Ambassador to Jamaica Sir George Ramocan informed me over brunch that apart from Israel, Jamaica has the highest record of Shabbat observance.

My best memories were making a film about the revival of the Maccabi sports club in Warsaw and Krakow, which featured the first football match to be played in over 3 decades. Now I’m seeing new Facebook posts from those same friends who’ve had anti-Semitic graffiti sprayed on their cars and doors, as well as flurries of hate mail. In my article, I had shared some of my interviews with African and Muslim migrants living in the same city; although many enjoy living in Poland and some feel patriotic, there seems to be a shared experience of being subject to xenophobia and violence. Turns out my article touched a nerve; in January it was viewed over 3,000 times.

A new theme I’m currently exploring this year is Jewish fashion. Back in 2016, I wrote a piece for HJS newsletter about the rise of Orthodox Tznius clothing on the runway and the debate about mainstream appropriation of religious clothing. Since then I launched a new online platform called Chai-Zine which showcases fashion, art and culture from Israel and the Jewish diaspora. One of my aims in starting the platform was to open an outlet for Jewish fashion designers and creatives to share their work, especially if it portrays a Jewish theme. I was particularly inspired by designers like Holy Land Civilians, who are captivating.

A Year In Review

By Sonti Ramirez

Moving forward to 2018, I found myself writing about my experiences of living in Poland for an article in the award winning Gal Dem Magazine (What’s it like being Black in Poland?, 2018), after hearing about a horrifying racist attack against a teenager in Warsaw, coincidentally in the same area where I stayed. The girl, of foreign origin, had been assaulted on her way home from school; her attacker had apparently shouted “Poland for the Poles”. Perhaps it should come as no surprise given the current political climate in Poland but for the minority communities living in the city, many of whom I have met and interviewed, it came as a shock and has generated a debate about the state of multiculturalism in Poland today.

When I came to study in Warsaw in 2014, as a history undergraduate from the SSEES department, I had begun researching into the waves of Polish-Jewish memory work and the visibility of ethnic minorities in the mainstream. During my time there, I interned with the Virtual Shtetl organisation and had the opportunity to participate in new memory work with the arrival of the Polin Museum. Many of the friends I made were Polish-Jews, active in reviving Jewish culture.

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As many of you will recall from the previous newsletter, the current academic session marks 50 years since UCL elevated its traditional study of Hebrew (established in 1826) into the independent Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies that we all know today. It also marks the 10-year anniversary of the passing of John Klier, professor of Eastern European Jewish history and Head of Department between 1994 and 2002. In order to memorialise these two major anniversaries, the Department held a commemorative evening on Wednesday 7 February 2018 in UCL’s Gustave Tuck Lecture Theatre. The event drew around 150 attendees, consisting of students, staff, alumni, and friends of the Department.

Sacha Stern opened the event with an overview of many of the features that make the Department unique, from the IJS (Institute of Jewish Studies) whose public lecture series and conferences many newsletter readers regularly attend, to our varied research which spans everything from ancient Babylonian medicine to the Arab-Israeli conflict, to our wonderful community of students and alumni.

Ada Rapoport-Albert painted a riveting picture of the Department in the 1960s and 1970s, describing it as a uniquely eccentric place (much as it remains today!). Her recollections included stories about Chimen Abramsky, Head of Department in the 1970s and 1980s, who would bring homemade -
fishcakes to conferences rather than using UCL catering services, and of the Departmental secretary who knew all of the correct official forms of address including the difference between a Duke and an Earl. David Ruderman, Joseph Meyerhoff Professor of Modern Jewish History at the University of Pennsylvania and longstanding associate of the Department, gave us a fascinating keynote speech in which he explored the work of Hyman Hurwitz, UCL’s first professor of Hebrew who joined the university soon after it was founded in 1826.

One of the things that makes the Department so special is our fantastic alumni, such as Richard Bolchover, a student in the Department from 1979 to 1983 who graduated with a BA in Hebrew Literature and Jewish History and has maintained close links with us ever since. He provided us with a spirited overview of his experiences as a Hebrew and Jewish Studies undergraduate in the early 1980s, noting that at the time, the Department was singled out in the national university admissions handbook for topping the charts in three distinct areas: ‘highest staff-student ratio’ (little has changed since then!), ‘highest dropout rate’, and ‘highest number of fails’ (I am happy to report that these are no longer the case!).

Another distinctive aspect of life in the Department is our vibrant community of Continuing Education (non-degree) students. Rachel Weston is an internationally renowned professional Yiddish singer who attended Yiddish courses with us as a Continuing Education student and performed the music for the event. Rachel highlighted the rich and varied nature of the Yiddish song repertoire with a wordless niggun, a folksong ultimately derived from an Irish source, and a socialist song translated from Catalan. (Another accomplished professional musician and HJS alumnus, Jonny Turgel, planned to perform at the event as well but was unfortunately unable to attend due to illness. We hope that he will be able to join us for another Departmental event soon.)
Philip Alexander, Professor of Postbiblical Jewish Literature at the University of Manchester and long-time friend and associate of the Department, gave the second keynote address of the evening. He provided a rousing overview of the last 50 years of Jewish Studies in the UK, and of the Department’s role in the development of the field. On a personal note, he delighted me with his account of how he discovered copies of Hebrew translator Isaac Salkinson’s nineteenth-century versions of Othello and Romeo and Juliet in the renowned library of Chimen Abramsky.

An important portion of the event was dedicated to the memory of John Klier, and we were honoured that John’s wife Helen and his children Sophia and Sebastian were there to mark it with us. Rachel Weston opened the memorial with a Yiddish song performance in tribute to John. Lia Kahn-Zajtmann and Emma Harris, HJS alumni who ran the Departmental office for many years, gave a moving homage to John including recollections of his kind manner, his generous and caring attitude to students, and his magical ability to cultivate plants (some of which are still flourishing in various Departmental offices around UCL). François Guesnet concluded the memorial with a tribute to John’s extraordinary academic legacy and the centrality of his research on Eastern European Jewish history.

In addition to HJS colleagues, alumni, and friends from other universities, we were also very fortunate to be joined by Anthony Smith, UCL Vice Provost (Education and Student Affairs), who spoke about the Department’s place within the wider UCL context, and by Stella Bruzzi, Dean of the UCL Arts and Humanities Faculty, who delivered the closing address.

The evening’s programme was followed by a reception where there was an opportunity to catch up with the wider HJS community. I feel very privileged to have been able to celebrate with friends and colleagues, to meet so many alumni, and to hear about their experiences as students in the Department.

I would like to give a huge thank you to all of our friends and supporters who made the event possible with their generous donations, as well as to all the Departmental staff, students, and speakers who contributed to it with their time and expertise. We are also very grateful to the UCL Arts and Humanities Faculty for filming and photographing the event, and hope to have these records of the evening up on the HJS website in the near future for you all.

Looking forward to seeing you at the Department’s 100th anniversary celebration!
Happy 50th Anniversary Celebration

Wednesday 7 February 2018
6pm – 9:30pm

This event was made possible by the generous support of friends of the Department.
On the 7th February, students, staff, alumni and friends of the Department gathered in the Gustave Tuck Lecture Theatre for an evening dedicated to celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the establishment of the independent UCL department of Hebrew & Jewish Studies.
Everyone was treated to some truly inspirational and meaningful speeches, as well as an exemplary musical performance from alumna Rachel Weston. We also commemorated the 10th anniversary of the passing of Prof. John Klier, Head of Department from 1994-2002.
BA History (Central & Eastern Europe) and Jewish Studies
Class of 2017 - Thank you for four wonderful years at the Department. And thank you to all of our lecturers and administrators!

P.S. Good luck to all staff members taking part in the strikes to stop the pension cuts. I hope the employers agree to keep the pensions as they are and that you get lots of support from students on the picket line!!

DAVID X
Photo: Pulpit and the "king's gallery" designed by Nicodemus Tessin the Elder.
Stockholm’s Jewish museum is reinventing itself during its relocation to the site of Sweden’s second oldest synagogue at Själagårds gate 19. First established in 1795 and frequented until 1870, Själagårds gate became the second ever permanent Jewish place of worship in Stockholm after the synagogue set up eight years earlier in Sjöbergska huset a few streets away. The narrow streets around Själagårds gate date from the 13th century and to find your way there it is likely you will end up walking in circles more than once, wandering through mysterious old shops and boutiques before finding the address. The architect’s office once housed there is now being transformed but there isn’t much to see inside, yet.

Reinventing Stockholm's Jewish Museum

By David Dahlborn

While works are on the museum has gone on the road, bringing its ideas and stories to audiences around the country in a series of events and exhibitions - organised as ‘Traces of Existence’, aiming to spotlight moments in Jewish history in Sweden. The first such event was held at the German Church last September, up the road from Själagårds gate, drawing attention to the baptism of two Jewish families on that site on 29 September 1681, a time when deviations from the state Protestant creed were banned.
"Maybe even to those who are today adapting to life in Sweden - the thousands of refugees who, cold and wet, crossed the Mediterranean and whose fates still weigh heavily on Swedish national conscience and discourse?"

Public invitations were advertised as a venisage in the underground and newspapers with the headline 'The Great Jew-baptism' - which was how the ceremony became known in 1681. The title's archaic language could lead visitors to believe the details of a forgotten historic crime would be revealed, but we learnt that while the significance of the ceremony was evidenced by the presence of the king, the conversions were most likely voluntary, albeit an adaptation to conditions set by the state. Still, the teaser ensured interest picked up and the venue was filled almost to capacity.

Despite the billed venisage, music and historical presentation was more prominent than art. There was choir song and speeches by museum directors and the church vicar. The event’s most interesting element was its multimedia online presentation of the original sources, available, with recordings, pictures and videos to the pews-seated audience through, the museum website.

Discovering a specific event with its actual location - unchanged since 1681 - for a venue contributed to a certain connection to the past.

The main artwork, however, was anticlimactic; a drenched jacket presented on a coat hanger above a bucket of water. Of course, it is always the thought that counts and a dripping jacket does pose some questions. What did its owner go through to become so soaked? Does it carry connotations of the loneliness and desertedness a migrant might feel in a society of forced homogeneity?

Maybe even to those who are today adapting to life in Sweden - the thousands of refugees who, cold and wet, crossed the Mediterranean and whose fates still weigh heavily on Swedish national conscience and discourse?

While the meaning of this artwork remains mysterious, much like the remaining tale of the baptised families (it is known that their spokesperson, Moses Jacob - later Gustav Michael Renat - was Viennese, but not where he ended his days), the event nevertheless inspired two questions relevant to our times: how do the representatives of Swedish Jewish history chose to present past events in relation to contemporary trends, and how does a museum adapt itself to bring its message to audiences more likely to spend time at happenings and browsing online archives than permanent exhibitions?
Photos: Al Hambra Cordoba, Wiki Commons
Andalusia is located in Southern Spain and it is famous for its sunny beaches, Flamenco music, Sherry wine and includes some of the world heritage museums of the three main monotheistic religions: Christianity, Islam and Judaism. It is to Andalusia that we moved in 2002, where I had the opportunity to have first-hand experience of Jewish life working with the local Jewish communities of the South.

During our 8 year stay, I had plenty of opportunities to visit main Andalusian cities and to observe different perspectives of the same place while interacting with local non-Jews with a keen interest in medieval Jewish life.

It was then, that I realised the perplexing paradox between a conscious effort to reconstruct collective memory and the substantial difference between historical facts and representation or perception of that past. I would like to raise some points for thought and debate based on my own experience and perhaps suggest the need of further study of history and collective memory. With the development of cultural tourism, there seems to be a renewed interest in Jewish medieval history with an intentional attempt in showing an idealised world of multicultural life between Christians, Muslims and Jews as if the Spanish medieval period

Collective Memory of Medieval Jews in Andalusia

By Paola Khalili
was of stability and peace and cultural reciprocity. However, this period was plagued by upheavals, internal wars between caliphates and the fact that Jewish life was not always stable as regions passed from Muslim to Christian hands and vice versa, rendering the Jews defenceless.

Moreover, as much as there is an attempt to signal medieval Jewish presence in Spain there is simultaneously an effort to minimise the unpleasant side of the history of Spain as if Jews were simply expelled and disappeared or as if whoever remained after the expulsion in Catholic Spain had never had to face the Inquisition as if it never had existed.

Although there were some attempts to amend and apologise to the Jews for the expulsion from Spain by revoking the edict of expulsion by King Juan Carlos I in 1968 and by granting citizenship to Sephardi descendants, there seems to be an avoidance to mention it. I found this in one of my many visits to La Alhambra in Granada, a palatial complex from the times of the Nasrid and the last Muslim bastion to be conquered in La Reconquista which unified the Kingdoms of Spain. This palace was used by the catholic King and Queen Fernando and Isabel as a symbol of their triumph. While visiting this complex, the audio-guide points the place where Queen Isabel authorised Columbus to sail to America, however it fails to mention that it was also here where the edict of expulsion of the Jews was signed. There is neither mention of the Queen’s Jewish ministers and that her Minister of Finance - Abarbanel decided to leave the court to join the expelled Jews. Neither mentions Torquemada and the Inquisition.

If there are any marking of Jewish life in Spain, it is done by an artificial attempt to sign the past presence of Jews with street marks or statutes. Some places are designated as Juderías – Jewish neighbourhoods with nothing more than a street sign high up in the wall or by building squares to place statutes of a Jewish distinguished figure such as Maimonides in Cordoba or Ibn Gabirol in Malaga. Sometimes, it is not even clear to what extent marking of medieval Jewish areas are based on historical facts or rather on popular belief. Very often we were approached by non-Jews wanting to show us supposedly houses or birthplaces of well-known Jewish sages such as Yehuda Halevi. Once, we were approached by a lady who wanted to sell us the supposedly birthplace of Maimonides and was rather puzzled that we were not interested. She was persistent and kept insisting that we have to contact some Jewish organisation or Jewish community to tell them about this house, it was not about the price or the location but the fact that she refused to believe that Jews would not be interested in her claim.

While medieval buildings and ruins had survived from the Muslim ruling period such as The Mesquita of Cordoba, La Alhambra in Granada, Medina Azahara and The Alcazar of Seville, just to mention a few, there are very scarce remains of medieval Jewish life in Spain. There are no medieval Jewish cemeteries left, except perhaps for some recent archaeological finds, there are only three medieval synagogues left in the country, one in the city of Cordoba, there are almost no traces of Mikvaot – ritual baths – neither tombstones that mark the resting place of many Jewish philosophers, scientists, poets and Rabbis that once lived in Spain. There are neither any signs of the inquisition as if any traces of its existence had vanished. It is hard to believe that if this institution existed continuously for almost 400 years that there are no buildings, sites or objects left. There are no monuments for the victims, no street markings of places of Auto de Fe, no museums that indicates the whereabouts of the Inquisitorial trials neither tools left for an institution that is well documented. I found by chance a small private museum in the little town of Ronda, neither its name or size prepared me to find elements used by the Inquisition. In the museum, there are a range of diverse antique objects like clocks, sewing machines, carriages and the likes, however in one room there is a San Benito wore by those accused by the Inquisition and also contained real torture machines used on victims during trial. I doubt that there are many places that contain Inquisition objects, but in this case, it was presented by a small private museum in a peripheral town and I doubt if many people know about it.

More than one occasion I met private people with an interest in Jewish life that managed to preserve Jewish related documents and elements. Therefore, it seems a paradox that while the idea of a representation of an idealised multicultural life is based on a pre-modern Spain that was based on division of Kingdoms and wars, at the same time the unified Spanish history after the Reconquista and which represents modern Spain, is minimised. It is as if by reducing the unpleasant side of its past, it clings to a ‘Golden Age’ that their ancestors fought to eradicate, but even this glorious past is represented externally, not because ‘nothing is left’ but rather as a consequence of the selection of the markers that characterise collective memory.
With the help of the largest research grant ever awarded within UCL’s Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Prof. Sacha Stern recently led a research project on the evolution and importance of calendars in late Antiquity and the Middle Ages with a special focus on Roman, Christian, Jewish, and Islamic calendars. We spoke to the Head of the UCL HJS Department to find out more.....
‘Calendars in Late Antiquity & the Middle Ages':
Interview with Sacha Stern

By Joel Greenbaum & Sonti Ramirez
Can you please summarise this research project?  
**When did it commence? When did it conclude?**
We started on the 1st February 2013 and we finished on the end of January this year, so it was a 5-year project. We had 5 full-time researchers and also one administrator.

**What were their roles in the project?**
Each of them were researching another area within the project, which was divided into a total of 5 research areas and different people were allocated to do different jobs within it.

**Were they all UCL personnel?**
Yes. The project was funded by the European Research Council (ERC), and everyone was employed by UCL, within the Hebrew and Jewish Studies Department.

**Why is researching calendars so important? What significance does this research hold today?**
People usually think of a calendar as just a handy technical device, but it’s actually a very important thing because a calendar structures the whole of time; it structures our lives, our social life and how people coordinate their activities with one another, so it is a very important structure of society which people often take for granted but it can’t be taken for granted. What I had already observed before I started the project was that if you go back to antiquity, you find that calendars are very fluid and very divided. Different communities had different calendars, and the way they related to one another was very complex.

As you go through history, these calendars become more standard and more unified, until you get to the modern world where essentially there is a global calendar, although there are still local calendars. It is a slow process where the calendar becomes more unified, standardised, fixed and unchangeable, and this is closely related to the gradual standardisation of human culture. In antiquity, you had big empires like the Roman Empire and then big religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam which took over the world. So in a certain way, it is really a story about globalisation.

**So did you focus on each of those calendars? (Roman, Jewish, Islamic & Christian)**
More or less. It wasn’t divided quite like that. We didn’t give as much attention to the Christian calendar as the others, so it wasn’t completely even-handed in that way. What we wanted to do was to look at specific examples of where you see a calendar becoming standardised - that was the most important thing. So one area we looked at, for example, was the 7-day week: when did the 7-day week become accepted as the standard way of reckoning the days?

**Is this the first project of its kind? Was there already some preliminary research?**
The research was quite original, as I don’t think anyone has ever done it. People have researched individual cases, but no one has really looked at the big picture, which is what interested me most. But in a way, that’s the good thing about this
research project: you can get many people from different areas of specialisation; different languages; different historical periods & different branches of literature, you can put them all together and make them think about one thing. This can produce really interesting results, which you couldn’t really do if everyone was working on his/her own.

**With respect to the time period of the Jewish calendar, what discoveries have you made?**

It is difficult to summarise what we have discovered in one sentence. We discovered lots of individual items which add up together to some sort of big picture. I don’t know if you can really call it a discovery; more of an insight into how calendars develop. For example, we have been working on various monographs; books which were produced in the Middle Ages. One is written by Al-Biruni, an Islamic writer in Central Asia writing around the year 1000 AD. He wrote a ‘grand encyclopedia’ of calendars and chronological systems in the ancient and medieval world up to his own period, with a strong focus on the Near and Middle East. It is an amazing piece of work, which had never done before and has never been done since. It is a really unique piece of literature, but it was never properly edited. Somebody brought it out 100 years ago, but it was based on bad manuscripts and a lot of chapters were missing. There was someone in our project, François de Blois, who was working full-time on just retrieving the better manuscripts, reading them, editing the text, translating and explaining what was going on. So it is not a discovery as such, but it is completely new research which will lead to the publication of a completely new book which is amazingly interesting, not just because of calendars but also because he talks about the annual cycle of different religious traditions and cultures. It is really a window into the multi-ethnic culture of the Islamic world around the year 1000, and is a very interesting piece of work.

**There is also a lot of focus on Islamic calendars as well. Is there any debate within that? Are there controversial aspects to the different concepts of time?**

There is some debate and some polemic. Al-Biruni is a very neutral person, although he’s Muslim and he makes it clear. He is not judgmental of other religions and he describes how the Jewish calendar works, the Christian calendar and so on. He is more like an ethnographer. But in the very many pieces of literature we have looked at, you do get polemical exchanges between Jews and Christians.

**Can you tell us about the character of Isaac Israeli in the Yesod Olam?**
"As you go through history, these calendars become more standard and more unified, until you get to the modern world where essentially there is a global calendar, although there are still local calendars..."
He finished his work in 1310. He was writing in Toledo in Spain, which is also a very interesting cultural zone, because it is a zone of exchange between Latin, Arabic, Christian and Islamic culture and Jews also. Although it is a book about the calendar, he feels that it is necessary to explain about astronomy, i.e. calendars are based on the sun and the moon. In order to understand astronomy, he has to give an introduction to mathematics. So you end up with a book which has a whole section about mathematics and a whole section about astronomy and it takes a very long time until he actually gets to the calendars. But you have a scientific compendium of knowledge which was very popular. This work of his has survived in more than 50 manuscripts which for Hebrew work is a huge amount. Most Hebrew works that we have from the Middle Ages don’t survive in as many manuscripts. The fact that we have so many manuscripts which have survived is an indication that it was a very popular work which many people copied, bought, read and so on. I think it says something about the cultural importance of the calendar which we don’t appreciate in our modern society, but medieval people did appreciate the importance of it and were interested in learning about it.

Going back to the process of collecting all the information, what was it like having different academics and PhDs synthesising all the research together?
That’s a very important question. Most of the people in this project were post-doctoral, meaning that they have just finished their doctorate. In an academic career nowadays, it is a very common pattern that you do a BA, MA and a PhD but you don’t walk into an academic job straightaway. What tends to happen now is take on a post-doctoral position, which can sometimes be open-ended. This means that you get a grant to do whatever research you want, but I think in most cases you become part of a research group. There are advantages and disadvantages.
The advantage is that it is a relatively unburdened position as you don’t get bogged down in administration and other things that people don’t like to do but you can actually devote your time to research which is a very good thing and you can advance to your level of knowledge beyond the doctoral level. The disadvantage is that you are tied to the project, so you have to work for the project and you can’t do what you want. The second one is that it is limited in time so it doesn’t give you security of employment. You have a job for 5 years but you have to go looking for another job. This bothers me because most of the people on the project are now looking for a job, and it bothers me that they have done very well in this project but we couldn’t find a way of keeping them on. It is a problem with the system, and it is not very fair and secure, but that’s how it is. All the time, I’m trying to find ways of continuing the work and getting the group to continue but it’s never quite the same group and I have to bring in other people. The very good thing about research projects is that we do work together. Although everyone is working in their own field, we met at very regular intervals (about once a month) to discuss and to present our research to one another and to exchange ideas. In that way, we really helped each other, even people who weren’t necessarily in the same field, but we still talked to each other. There was a lot of email correspondence, somebody had a question and wanted to find out something. That’s an amazing thing because most people who do research on their own have no-one to talk to, and if they have a question or want help from another person they have to go begging and ask for a favour. Here, we were not asking favours, as we were all part of the same group, so we could freely ask each other for help. Also, we knew that there were people out there who were interested in the same things we were and we could talk to them. That is the very big advantage of a research project.

UCL has a new Connected to Curriculum programme running. As a research-based project, do you think that it has been quite useful in getting more people on board? Do you see the project being open to undergraduates or postgraduates in the future? That has been a difficult aspect. We would like to have involved students in the project, but we quickly found that it demanded a high level of knowledge which we couldn’t expect of students. For example, we thought students could help us reading our manuscripts, but the first thing they need is a really good mastery of the language, because if you don’t know the language, even if you know the Aleph Bet, you can read a printed text without understanding what it says, but in a manuscript where the letters are not very clear, unless you know the language, you won’t be able to figure out what is written there. There was a summer programme for students along similar lines, but in the end, we couldn’t get anyone on board which is a shame. I also would like to have had PhD students, but they weren’t forthcoming, because when you do a PhD you want to do it in a subject which interests you, which is understandable because it is 3 years of your life. So even though we were prepared to offer money or scholarships, in the end we didn’t attract anyone. There was one American student, but she was going to be classified as an overseas student. All these problems!

Finally, how do you think that the project will impact the Jewish community in particular?
I didn’t really see this project as a Jewish project, although it was led in this department and there was a strong Jewish component, but there was also a strong Islamic, Christian and Roman component. It was really meant to be a broad-based project. So if you ask me the impact on the Jewish community, the first thing I would say is the impact on the international
community at last: our project has done a lot to draw attention to the importance of calendars, that it is something worth studying. I'm actually seeing more people doing work on this, so that's a good thing. For example, we had a workshop a few years ago where the theme was 'Diagrams and Images in Manuscripts'. We did this because we realised that a lot of our manuscripts had either tables or diagrams which are a good way of explaining calendars and astronomy. So we ran a general workshop on this and we had experts on Medieval Hebrew manuscripts who came to the workshop without any knowledge of calendars. They sat through the workshop, and at the end they said, 'you know, we have learned something very important here, which is that when we look at a manuscript, it is not just the text that's important but the images which appear are also very important and worth studying.' For me, this was important because I felt that in this way, our project had been able to contribute something beyond calendars which was of interest and relevance to other people. Going back to the Jewish community, Jewish people are generally very interested in their calendar, particularly as it is not the main calendar. If you ask a Christian, whose calendar is the same as everyone else's, they may take it for granted and not realise that there is anything interesting about it. But for Jewish people who run two lives, who run according to the secular and Jewish calendars, it is a bit of a challenge and creates a bit of interest. There is quite bit of interest in the Jewish community around the world in the calendar, so I think our project has had an impact in that direction too.
Why Is My Curriculum So Male?

By Imogen Resnick
Since October, I have been leading a UCL ChangeMakers research project entitled “Female Academics: An Aspirational Influence?”, focussing on the departments of Hebrew and Jewish Studies (HJS), Philosophy, European Social and Political Studies (ESPS), and the School of European Languages, Culture and Society (SELCS). The project was inspired by the fact that only 24% of UK university professors are women and my own student experience: having studied at UCL for a long 3.5 years, I can attest that Arts and Humanities’ reading lists are overwhelmingly dominated by male academics. Additionally, my home departments have had noticeable fewer female academic staff (in HJS, there are only two full-time female academics).

Sometimes I have seen a female academic on my reading list and been pleasantly surprised by the mere fact of her inclusion: it’s 2018, I should not be surprised by a woman’s presence. Of course, this is but one woman’s opinion – hence why I set out to see if others agree (spoiler alert: they mostly do).

Conducting focus groups with female final-year students and interviewing staff across the departments, we have sought to understand to what extent the presence and absence of female academics – both as lecturers and as authors of reading material on the curriculum – have shaped female students’ academic experiences and aspirations. Our findings have been incredibly interesting and diverse, and our early informal analysis has yielded key themes, three of which are:

Role Models: Female students feel inspired by female lecturers; as one student said, “it’s just nice to see smart women”. In another example, a student talked about not even seeing academia as an option (because her field is so male-dominated) until she was explicitly encouraged by a female academic.

Reading Lists: Many female students are happy to see the presence of female academics on reading lists, agreeing that this shows how under-represented women are. One student spoke about being “less interested” and (intellectually) ‘checking out’ if a course’s content lacked diversity. Students spoke of subconsciously assuming a writer was male if their gender was not clear, agreeing this reflected a bad situation.

Self-confidence: In our interviews, a recurring theme was “imposter” syndrome; female academics, lacking self-confidence, can feel as though they’re not good enough to be where they are. One talked about being patronised by her more senior male colleagues; another referred to an incident where it was assumed that she was an assistant and not the academic. I would argue that there is a secret crisis of self-confidence amongst women in higher education (and society more broadly), a claim validated by research that investigated student seminar participation across 35 institutions: men are two and a half times more likely to ask a question than women, with women citing not feeling “clever enough” as a reason for remaining silent.
"I would argue that there is a secret crisis of self-confidence amongst women in higher education..."


So how does all this affect HJS? Well, I propose that the department (and indeed, every department within A&H) take tangible steps to improve female students’ academic experience and better inspire us to pursue post-graduate study or an academic career. Formal recommendations are coming soon, but some suggestions (reader: feel free to critique and offer others) include: a lecture series of female academics talking about their careers, a tool-kit for academics to ensure that they are thinking about these issues (akin to SOAS’ 'Decolonising SOAS Learning and Teaching Toolkit') and modifying feedback forms to include evaluation of content itself - not just of its dissemination.

Since I will soon graduate into the dark realm of unemployment, if any student – or indeed, staff-member (of any gender) – reading this would be interesting in championing the project and ensuring that HJS is held accountable, please speak to me! Radical feminist politics desirable but not required.
Ithiel

By Paul Moore

Preparation for the student/staff production of Isaac Salkinson’s masterful transposition of Shakespeare’s *Othello* into Maskilic Hebrew - *Ithiel the Cushite of Venice* - continues apace. The cast comprises both veterans of last year’s production of Salkinson’s *Ram and Yael* and new faces.

Ithiel, a Cushite, who has risen to the post of commander of the Venetian army, marries Asenath, the daughter of a Venetian aristocrat. However, marital bliss is marred when Doeg, Ithiel’s trusted ensign, deceives him into believing Asenath has been unfaithful. Chaos ensues as Doeg entraps those around him in a web of deceit with a view to their destruction. Themes explored in the play include jealousy, betrayal, the fallibility of sense perception and the dark potential of the human soul.
The rehearsals are certainly a highlight of the week, conducted in a fun atmosphere and, above all, serve as an excuse to dress up and play with swords! Importantly, as many cast members will attest, involvement in the productions has proved helpful in consolidating their knowledge of Hebrew. It is hoped that these productions will lay a foundation for future Hebrew (and other ancient language) drama projects.

Salkinson’s Hebrew translation offers a fascinating and unique perspective on global Shakespeare. Differing significantly from the original English, Salkinson’s version is replete with biblical, rabbinic, and medieval Hebrew textual references and reflects a profoundly Jewish religious and cultural setting.

Ithiel the Cushite of Venice will be performed at the Bloomsbury Studio on June 19th and 20th 2018. The Bloomsbury’s website will be open for bookings in due course.

*Photo: Rehearsing the final scene of Ithiel, the murder of Asenath (Desdemona)*
ANNOUNCEMENT

Calling All Singers!!

THE LONDON YIDDISH CHOIR, led by Polina Shepherd (pictured), meets Tuesdays 6.30-8.30pm at The Jewish Museum in Camden Town.

Open to music lovers of all backgrounds and singing levels; knowledge of Yiddish not necessary. Repertoire includes folk songs, spiritual melodies, contemporary pieces and lots more.

Contact: londonyiddishchoir@gmail.com

For more info:  
www.polinashepherd.co.uk/choirs/yiddish-choir/  
www.facebook.com/londonyiddishchoir
The Department is keen to expand our circle of supporters to enable the best and brightest minds to study with us and extend the reach and impact of our research.

If you are interested in joining this effort or finding out more, please get in touch with our Departmental Manager, Ms Vanessa Clarke (vanessa.clarke@ucl.ac.uk).
Pioneering Jewish Studies. Since 1826.

The UCL Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies is a world-leading centre in the heart of London, noted for its innovative research and teaching. Drawing on UCL’s tradition of secularism and open-mindedness, we integrate all aspects of Jewish Studies, from antiquity to modernity, through the prism of history, literature, and languages.

We are the only university department in the UK dedicated to the field of Hebrew and Jewish Studies and its comprehensive, integrated study. We train future scholars and educate the wider community.